VEDIC PHILOSOPHY

Everything you Always wanted to know
About
Vedas, Creation, Yoga, Reincarnation
But did not know who to ask?

Dr. Satya pal Arya

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THE VEDIC PHILOSOPHY

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FOREWORD

Human life is a blessing. Those who realize this, value it and want to utilize it and strive for truth, the knowledge for which our soul is craving for! This book is for those aspirants who understand the first statement and are interested to know the path which is taught by Vedas, by sages and researchers of ancient and modern times, the true path that leads to the happiness of the soul. The book gives insight of Vedic Teachings as depicted by philosophers who have devoted their life to find the truth and sacrificed their life in the service of mankind.

The author has tried to bring the true picture of growth of Hinduism and its various branches. This overview and brief introduction is included to compliment the association with the context. The answers to questions of life in direct, simple and interactive style in conversation mode and the elaboration to the point deserve credit to the author. The author is a voracious reader and has faith in Vedic Sanskriti and its teachings as reflected through his writing.

Veda, the sacred book of knowledge owes respect by all. Its principles, give you directions to lead life in right manner. This book gives you the glimpse of true notes and writing of sages and saints who lead their lives walking on the path of truth and devoted it for almighty and service of mankind.

The book give essence of Vedic knowledge and doctrine of life in a nutshell packaged for seekers of truth. What is Yoga? Where does it lead to? Death, what is it? What happens after death? The soul, its limits and strengths etc. are the topics gravely touched and explained. With this book the author has tried to follow the principle-: " Ved ka parana paraana aur sunana sunaana sab aryon ka param dharm hai" i.e. " It is prime duty of each Arya-great intellectual being to read, teach and listen , recite the Ved Epic....".

—Smt. Saroj Arya

PREFACE

Most of us spend our lives searching for happiness, comforts and pleasures and trying to prevent or avoid suffering. When we are successful, we do indeed find satisfaction. But we have to acknowledge that these pleasures are transitory and short lived. All of us have searched for peace, joy and fulfillment in material things, family and friends and looking for name and fame. A cynic tells us that sex, money and fame make the world go round. But peace and contentment elude us.

There is a deep yearning in our hearts to achieve a state of mind where we are at peace with ourselves and are not constantly buffeted by contradictory emotional storms and desires that rage in our minds. Is it a pipe dream? Can such a state of mind be achieved?

One point of view is that this is how life is, consisting of ups and downs, pleasures and sorrows and duality. This state of calm and peaceful mind is an illusion.

Throughout the human history, many religious and spiritual scholars have stated categorically that not only this mental state is possible, but it should be the noblest goal of every one's life. Since this book is based on Vedic and ancient Aryan scriptures, I will try to answer from that tradition.

There is a famous verse in Rigveda which state," I know about an Exalted Conscious Being who is all knowing and untouched by any kind of limitations or ignorance. Only by knowing or realizing Him, we can cross the sea of misery, suffering and even conquer death. I don't know of any other way."

The Rishi in Shvetashvater Upnishada says," The day when we can roll the space into a sleeping mat and be able to rest on it, that day we can conquer death and suffering without knowing God." Just as it is impossible to roll the space into a mat, it will not be possible to transcend human suffering without Self Realization.

These are very unambiguous statements. We are left asking whether God exists. What is He like? Where does He live? Is it possible to know Him? How can we know Him? Who am I? What is the purpose of Life? What is my place in the scheme of things?

The scriptures in every religion have tried to answer these fundamental questions in different ways for thousands of years. In this book, I am writing the belief system illustrated in ancient scriptures of four Vedas, eleven Upanishads, six schools of Philosophy, Yoga Shastra written by Sage Patanjali, Manusmriti, Bhagvad Geeta and many other spiritual books in the Vedic tradition. I hope this effort gives my readers better understanding of ancient Vedic Philosophy and guides them in search of divine life.

—Satya Pal Arya

Contents

GOD AND OTHER ETERNAL ENTITIES

I am God Almighty. I am the light of the world just as the sun illuminates the solar system. Neither death nor defeat can ever approach me. I am the controller and creator of the universe. Strive diligently to acquire true knowledge, which is everlasting wealth. Follow my teachings in Vedas and may you never lose my friendship. I am the prompter of all that is good and true. I reward those who devote themselves to relieve the sufferings of humanity. I am the cause and I am the support of all that exists in the universe. May you never turn away from me and may you never worship anybody except me.

(Rigveda chapter 10 verse 48.)

Is there a God?

According to the ancient Hindu Scriptures Vedas, the answer is unquestionably and emphatically yes. God is not a person but a Conscious, all powerful, all knowing Being. His main functions are creation, sustenance, and at the appropriate time dissolution of the cosmos and giver of just rewards or punishments to all the souls according to their actions in life, also known as Karma.

What is God's name?

Because of His vastly different actions, the seers and spiritually realized people call Him with different names e.g. Father, Teacher, Creator etc. In the Vedas God in first person verses says that His name is OM also written as AUM. In Yoga Meditation the Yogis chant this name to concentrate their restless mind and try to achieve higher levels of mental concentration and silence.

What is God like and what He is not?

In 40th chapter of Yajur Veda these are the qualities or characteristics that have been described.

1. God is like the space, He is very subtle and present everywhere. He permeates everything.

2. He is pure and without any particular shape or form. So there is no question of His having a body muscles or sinews.
3. He is pure consciousness, all knowing, and untouched by any sins, impurities or any limitations.
4. He is the Author of Vedas, a source of all knowledge, knows even our very thoughts!
5. He is Eternal-never born and never dies.
6. He is The Ultimate Cause of All the creation and all the Knowledge that ever existed, is present now or will exist in future.

Things or entities those are eternal.

Eternal means that It always was, is present now and will exist for ever, is never born and never dies and therefore timeless. There are three entities which are eternal.

1. First and foremost, God or Om is eternal. God is also known as The Efficient Cause or The Creator. He creates the Cosmos using the primordial particles in different permutations and combinations but remains separate from the Cosmos. In order to be an Efficient Cause, the entity has to be alert, conscious and full of knowledge before it is capable of creation.
2. The second entity that is eternal is the Primordial Matter or Prakriti. Prakriti is the Material Cause of all things that exist in the universe. The qualities of the Matter as described in Vedas and Sankhya Shastra written by sage Kapil are:

   A. The Matter or Prakriti is inert, lacks consciousness, and is never self-directed. But it is eternal. It has always coexisted with God. The creation can not occur without matter but lacking any will or intelligence it (the matter) can not create anything by itself but needs an intelligent and conscious being (the efficient cause) to mold or manipulate it purposefully.

   B. The Matter or Prakriti exists in two different forms:

   i. During the Grand Dissolution the matter is extremely

tiny, particulate and each particle carries a net positive, negative or neutral charge. The net amount of matter is fixed in the Universe. Neither new matter is created nor is it destroyed. It merely changes shape and form.

ii. During creation God aggregates and manipulates the properties of the primordial particles and by different permutations and combinations creates all the living and nonliving things that then become the visible World. Thus matter though eternal is constantly changing. In the primordial form it is the smallest form of existence. Like the space it is everywhere. God is the most subtle of all the existence and permeates the matter everywhere. Because God is the most microscopic entity, He is able to manipulate and create using the primordial particles.

3. The third entities that are eternal are the Souls. They are also known as Self or Atman or Jiva.

A. All living things whether they are humans, animals or plants have a soul.

B. The Souls are uncountable by us but they are fully in God's knowledge.

C. The Soul is conscious, alert and is present in all living things.

D. The Soul has coexisted with God; it was never born and never dies.

E. In Vedic scriptures when Soul enters a body, it is called the birth. Death occurs when the Soul leaves the body.

F. Its two eternal qualities are desire for knowledge and actions based on that knowledge.

G. It exists either in the state of bondage when it goes through the cycles of repeated births and deaths

H. Or in the state of Emancipation also known as Moksha or Nirvana.

I. A third state also exists during the Grand Dissolution when

the Souls are in deep sleep like state. They are neither in the cycles of birth and death nor are they emancipated.

J. The Soul is also an Efficient Cause capable of creating things out of matter which is provided to him by God, for example using iron, copper, gold and other ores. The capability and knowledge of any soul no matter how intelligent is miniscule compared to God.

K. The Soul is conscious and has the power of decision, discretion and direction or purpose.

The other eternal entities are Time, Space, the cycles of life and death, creation and dissolution etc. God creates all living and nonliving things out of The Matter to nurture and sustain all the Souls. The bodies of all living things are made out of matter and are therefore inherently inert and nonliving. It is the presence of Soul, the conscious entity, which imbues it with necessary spark of life.

What proof do we have that there is God?

In Vedic scriptures, in order to prove anything three types of proofs or evidence are acceptable, direct evidence, indirect evidence, and the written record or testimony of an expert in the field of knowledge. Let us discuss it in more detail.

1. Direct Evidence is that kind of knowledge which is the result of direct contact of the five senses (vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch) with their objects, of the mind with the senses, and of the soul with the mind.

But this knowledge must not be superficial. For example, you ask someone to bring you some water and he brings it. Now, what you and your friend see is not the word water but the object signified by it. So now you have the direct knowledge of the object called water.

Also this knowledge must not be temporary or transient, i.e., not the product of observation under unfavorable circumstances; for example, a person saw something at night and thought that it was a person, but when it was day light he found out that it was not a man but a pillar. Now his first impression of the thing was of a temporary nature, which changed into correct permanent knowledge later on when the true nature of the thing was revealed in the daylight.

For this knowledge to be called direct evidence, it should be free from all elements of doubt, and be certain in character. For example if you see a man from a distance and say," Is it Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones?" Now as long as you are in doubt and therefore not sure about a thing that you observe, your knowledge cannot be called direct evidence.

God can not be experienced by the senses. Our senses have limited capabilities. Our mind and intellect can understand qualities of God but since they are made out of matter and are inert and unconscious, they can not experience God either. Only our soul, the conscious principle in us is capable of directly realizing or experiencing the true nature of God. During highest states of Yoga, the soul loses all awareness of the body, mind, intellect and in this eighth stage of Yoga Samadhi (deepest trance) the soul achieves Self Realization and direct knowledge of God simultaneously. There is a verse in Athrva Veda that says," A self realized Yogi sees God with as much clarity and certainty as an ordinary person sees the sun in cloudless sky during the day time ."

2. Indirect Evidence (Inference): If two things have been observed to exist together at some time and place, then if on another occasion, one of the two is observed, the other, i.e., the unknown can be inferred. For example, if you see a child you can infer that she must have had parents. Again if you see smoke rising behind a hill, you can safely infer the presence of fire even though it is invisible.

Indirect evidence is of four kinds:-

A. First type in which you reason from cause to effect, e.g., the inference of coming rain from the observation of certain clouds.

B. Second type in which you infer from effects to causes. If you see flood in a river, you can assume that either it must have rained on the mountains or the snow must be melting. Again, when you see a watch, you infer that a watchmaker made it. When you see this incredible universe, it is not hard to infer the existence of the Spiritual cause (Creator) as well as of a Material cause (the elementary particles).

C. Third type is that kind of inference, in which there is no relation of cause and effect but there is some kind of similarity between the two. For example, we know no person can get to

another place without moving from the first place where that person was. Therefore if we find a person at one place, he cannot be present at another place at the same time.

The greatest scientific human knowledge about atoms, structure of atoms, the concept of nucleus, protons, electrons, neutrons, the basic forces of gravity, electromagnetic force, the strong and weak force, dark matter etc have been discovered with indirect evidence. These can not be known by the senses.

I would recommend my readers to read the book Evolution from Space, A theory of cosmic creationism, by Sir Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe, published by Simon & Schuster. This book raises questions about mathematical impossibility of the creation by random chance as advocated by modern science. To my knowledge, no body has been able to answer their objections in a satisfactory manner.

If we gather all the material needed to build a house in one place and wait, what are the odds that a house will be built by itself? And when we see the incredible complexity of D.N.A and R.N.A and nearly two thousand proteins and enzymes necessary for proper cellular function, it is pretty hard to believe that this happened by random shuffling of amino acids. Darwinian evolution may be possible when we have functioning cells but how did the cell evolved in the first place out of unintelligent inorganic elements.

3. The written record or testimony of an expert in the field of knowledge is third kind of credible evidence. In scientific matters we respect the opinions of the experts in their area of expertise. For example, Einstein is an authority in the field of Physics. In Spiritual matters an example is The Book of Yoga by the Sage Patanjali. Sankhya Shastra written by sage Kapil describes the steps in the process of creation. I have written about his point of view on the chapter of Creation in this book.

Q. IS God All-pervading or does He reside in some particular place?

He is all pervading. God is the subtlest of the eternal entities (souls and primordial particles) and therefore He is able to permeate, control and create or change them If He was localized, He could never be omniscient, inward regulator of

all, universal controller and creator of all, because it is impossible for a doer to act in a place where he is not present.

Q. Is God Just as well as Merciful?

God Is both.

Q. These two attributes are opposed to each other, since justice consists in giving a person the just amount of reward or punishment-neither more nor less depending upon the nature of his deeds, while mercy consists in letting the offender go unpunished. How can God be merciful and just at the same time?

In Vedic Scriptures, justice and mercy are really synonyms. The object served by justice is the same as accomplished by mercy. I disagree with your definition of mercy and justice. The object of punishment through justice is to prevent people from committing crimes and enable them to be free from pain and misery. The object of mercy is also to rid people of suffering. The infliction of just punishment in exact accordance with the amount of crime is called justice. If the offender is not punished, mercy will be destroyed, because letting a criminal go unpunished amounts to exposing several righteous and law abiding citizens to the risk of suffering. What mercy is there in that situation? Justice and mercy are both served well in criminal justice system if the offender is appropriately punished by imprisonment and as an act of mercy, the State tries to rehabilitate him by teaching him moral values and some skills so that he can earn a living after release from the prison.

Q. Does God have a form or is He formless?

He is formless, because if He possesses a form He could never be Omnipresent or Omniscient. A finite substance can possess only finite attributes, actions and nature. For he who is the product of the combinations of different particles, must have an intelligent maker. God is never embodied. He is like the Space, present everywhere, only more subtle compared to space and unlike space He is conscious, pure love and source of all true knowledge . Thus He is able to make the visible universe out of invisible primordial particles.

Q. Is God all powerful or not?

Yes He is but let us be clear about the meaning of the word All-powerful It means that God does not require any assistance from any person in all His works such as Creation, Sustenance, Dissolution of the Universe, and administration of Divine Justice. In other words, He does all His works with His own infinite power.

Q. But we believe that God can do whatever He likes, for there is no one above Him.

What does He like? Can He kill Himself? Can He become ignorant, commit sins?

Be unhappy? The answer is no because all these things are totally opposed to His nature. If you say that God cannot be unjust and therefore He is not All-powerful, so be it. He does not punish a soul unless it commits a sin of its own free will. So in that sense if God in His infinite Wisdom has chosen to put some limits on his power, which is what makes Him the Supreme Lord of the Creation.

Q. What does God desire?

The good of all, and the happiness of all living beings, but He does not by the caprice of His Own Will, subordinate one person to another without an offence.

Q. Does God forgive sins?

No never. If He were to do that, His system of justice will flounder. Based on our good or bad actions in life (Karma), He rewards or deprives us of spiritual, mental and physical benefits. Now of course we never complain about getting good things in life, only about the sufferings. But the law of Karma is just and absolute. By our free will, if we do good or bad things in life, we will be judged accordingly.

Q. Should we glorify God, pray to Him and commune with Him?

Yes, absolutely!

Q. By doing so, will God suspend His laws and forgive our sins?

No.

Q. Why should we then worship God?

Its object is altogether different. Glorification gives rise to love of the Supreme Being and reformation of one's own character. Glorification is positive and negative. Positive glorification consists of praising God as having positive attributes like

Omnipresence, purity, perfection and infinite love Negative glorification consists of praising God as devoid of such qualities: He is never embodied, is never born, never commits sins, is not subject to pain, grief, and ignorance. The object of glorification is to understand attributes of God and then reform one's character using Him as your model and teacher. For example, God is just so we should strive to be just in all our life's affairs.

The prayer creates humility, courage and helps obtain Divine help. A man should act in accordance with what he prays for. If he prays for highest wisdom, let him do his utmost to achieve it and then also seek Divine help. No one should pray in following manner: O Lord, destroy my enemies! Make me superior to all! Nor should one pray to God to cook our food, work in our farms etc. The greatest fools are they who remain slothful and indolent, because God's commandment is: Let a man aspire to live for hundred years and beyond but he should be active and working. Let him never be lazy.

The Communion is the path towards Self Realization. One should study and follow eight steps of Yoga as described in Yoga Shastra written by the Sage Patanjali. In the highest states of meditation, the Soul experiences God directly and that bliss and joy is indescribable.

Q. Does God desire praise? Is that why he wants us to praise Him and Pray to Him?

No of course not God is all knowledge and all bliss. Our relationship with God is like a parent to his children. He does not need, want, crave or desire anything from us. What can we

possibly give him that is ours? He has given to us our mind, body and our very breath.

In the world, parents teach children to respect their elders because this good habit will be of great value to them in life. So if we glorify, pray and meditate upon God, we will find great happiness in this life and after Self Realization escape the painful cycle of birth and death. We are the ones who will benefit most by remembering the Lord.

Q. Does God incarnate or not?

No He does not. God is not a person but a power, Omnipresent, Conscious Being. By His nature, He cannot be born as a human being.

If He can create this entire Cosmos, He is totally capable of taking care of the needs of his devotees without having to be born as a human being.

He is like the space, present every where. He cannot be concentrated in one spot because there is no place which is devoid of His existence.

Now human being consists of a combination of conscious principle Soul on one hand and Astral body and gross body which is made out of the inert unconscious primordial particles on the other hand.

God is Pure Consciousness mixed with nothing else, and therefore He cannot be born as a human being (a mixture of conscious soul and inert, unconscious matter).

This is an important principle that conscious entities (God or souls) cannot become inert and unconscious. Similarly inert and unconscious matter can never become alert and conscious. This difference is irreversible and this line can not be crossed. The reasons bodies of living things appear conscious are due the presence of the soul within them.

Q. Is human soul a free agent or subordinate to the will of God?

The soul is a free agent in so far as the performance of Karma is concerned but having committed the actions, is subject to the laws of God in reaping the fruits of his action.

Q What is a free agent?

He is called a free agent who has the body, the mind and the senses subordinate to his will. If the souls were not a free agent it would not reap the fruits of their deeds whether good or bad.

Just as soldiers acting under the direction of their commanding officer are not guilty of murder even though they may have killed many enemy troops. Similarly, if God were to influence the course of human conduct or if human actions were subordinate to His Will, it would not be the human beings that would have to bear the consequences of those actions but God Himself.

Just as a man who commits a murder with a weapon is arrested and punished and not the weapon; similarly, the souls acting under the Will of God could not justly be made to reap the fruits of their deeds whether they are sinful or virtuous.

Therefore it follows that the soul can perform any action of its free will, but once the action is committed whether it is good or bad, it (soul) has to submit to the Divine Justice and may receive reward or suffering depending upon the Karma.

Q. If God had not created the soul and endowed it with energy, it could never have been able to do any action; hence whatever a human soul does is done solely through Divine impulse?

God never created the souls. They are eternal and like God and primordial matter have no beginning and no end. God made the Astral body and the gross body for the human beings, but they are under the control of the soul. Therefore whoever performs an act-good or evil-suffers the consequences of that action and not God who made his body.

For example:- A man dug iron out of a mine and sold it to a merchant. A blacksmith bought it from the merchant and made a sword out of the iron ore. Next a criminal buys the sword and uses it to kill someone with it. It is not the miner, nor the merchant, nor the blacksmith, nor the sword that are held responsible in the eyes of the law. It is the criminal alone who is arrested and punished. In the same way, it is not God,

the Maker of the body, who can be blamed for the actions of the soul that it has performed under its own free will.

Had God been the actual doer, no soul would ever commit a sin, because being Pure and Righteous, He would never encourage any soul to commit a sin.

In this model of the universe there are only two choices God has in regards to the status of the souls, either they have free will and be subject to Divine justice according to the laws of Karma, or they be totally subordinate to the Will of God and never commit any sin and not suffer any consequences. In the latter case, there will be no difference between a soul and a rock or piece of metal, because there is no free will.

While raising children, mother knows that if the child were allowed freely to play, he might injure or harm himself, still she would not consider tying him up with a rope to protect him. That is the risk the mother takes knowing fully well that lack of freedom will be far more painful to the child. Similarly Divine Mother in its infinite wisdom has chosen to give freewill to all the souls. It is only due to their own free actions, the souls create happiness and misery for themselves. God is simply the Divine Judge.

Q. What are God and the soul in essence, and what are their natures, attributes and actions?

In essence they are both conscious entities. By nature both are pure, immortal and virtuous etc.

The creation of the universe, its sustenance and dissolution into elementary forms and its control, the awarding of the results of their deeds to the souls are the righteous actions of God.

While the reproduction and rearing of children, the learning of knowledge and arts are the actions of souls whether they are virtuous or sinful.

Eternal knowledge, Eternal bliss and Omnipotence etc., are the attributes of God.

The attributes of souls are: Desire for acquisition of things; repulsion, activity, feeling of pleasure, pain, and sorrow,

consciousness, inspiration and expiration, organic growth, discernment, memory, individuality, movement, regulation of senses, internal changes and disorders, such as hunger and thirst, joy and sorrow etc., that distinguish it from God.

The existence of the soul is known only by these attributes, as it (soul) is neither material nor perceptible by the senses. These attributes manifest themselves only so long as the soul is present in the body, but cease to exist as soon as the soul leaves it. Those qualities that manifest themselves in the presence of a substance and cease to do so in its absence belong to that substance alone.

For example, the light is the property of luminous objects like sun or a lamp, because it is absent in their absence and present in their presence. Thus, God and the soul are known by their attributes.

Q. **Are the souls in different bodies distinct or is there only one soul pervading them all?**

The souls in different bodies are distinct.

If we observe the world, we see that some people are happy, others are suffering, and some are being born while others are dying. Had there been only one soul pervading them all, wakeful state, slumber, deep sleep, birth and death, union and disunion with the body and its senses could never take place.

The nature of the soul therefore is finite, and so is its knowledge; it is also subtle, while God is ultra microscopic, infinite, omnipresent, omniscient by nature. Hence God is able to permeate, observe and reward or punish the souls.

Q. **How can two separate things exist in the same space?**

This law is applicable in case of two entities of similar sizes. For example iron is gross and electricity is subtle and therefore electricity can permeate the iron and reside in the same space with it. Similarly the soul is less subtle than God; therefore, God permeates the soul.

Q. **God and soul possess the attributes of Existence, Consciousness and Blissfulness common to each other**

and therefore are one. The soul is a spark from God. Why do you disagree with this belief?

The fact of two things possessing few attributes in common does not make them one. For example, a man and an ant see with their eyes, eat with their mouths and walk with their feet, yet they are not one and the same, as their body form is very different. A man has two feet while an ant has many and so on.

Similarly, God's attributes of Omniscience, Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Infinite Knowledge and Bliss are different than the soul's attributes of finite knowledge, finite power, finite nature, liability to error etc. Therefore God and soul are not one and n can never be one.

Q. Does God possess desire?

God does not have that kind of desire which human beings have. Human desire is another name for passion excited by the love of an object from which pleasure is expected, because you only desire to obtain a thing which you do not already possess, which is of a superior quality and is going to give pleasure.

Now there is nothing that God does not possess or is superior to Him, and being All Bliss He can also have no desire for further happiness. Therefore there is no possibility of desire in God. But according to Vedas, God has Ikshan, which is a kind of Divine Desire motivated by good of all living beings and is manifested in dissemination of True knowledge and creation of the universe.

I will close this chapter with quotations from Vedas and other Scriptures:

1. One Supreme Ruler pervades this universe. He is true God. Fear Him, O men! Do not covet anything that does not belong to you. Whatever you have earned through honest means, enjoy while sharing it with others. Think about it. Who is the rightful owner of everything in this World? Of course, pleasures and possessions are only for your use for a limited time based on your Karmas and in reality belong to God. (Yajur Veda chapter 40 verse 1).
2. God teaches in Veda," O men, I existed before the whole universe came into being. I am the Lord of all and I am the eternal cause of the whole creation. I am the original source and giver

of all wealth. Let all people look up to me alone as children look up to their parents. I have created and apportioned different foods for all creatures so they may live happily.(Rig Veda)

3. God existed before the creation. He is the Creator, support and sustainer of the luminous and non-luminous worlds. He was, is and will be the Creator of past, present and future universes. He is Eternal Bliss. May we all worship and adore Him and always follow His teaching as described in Vedas.(Yajur Veda chapter 13 verse 4).

4. Lead us O Lord, from falsehood to the truth, from darkness to light of knowledge, and from death and sufferings to immortality and eternal happiness. (Shat Path Brahman 14-3-1).

5. All the Vedas write about Him. The scholars and Yogis meditate upon Him. Let me tell you briefly, He is Om. (Kathopanishada Valli 2 verse15).

6. There are two types of knowledge in this world. One is about the material world (Apara Vidhya). The second is the spiritual knowledge about God (Para Vidhya). Both are important but Para Vidhya (spiritual knowledge) is superior. (Mundakopanishada 1-1-verse5)

7. The Self Realized Yogi knows God with as much clarity and certainty as we see the sun in cloudless sky during the day time. (Atharva Veda 1-1-4).

8. The Self Realized Yogi says," I know that Great God who is more brilliant than the sun and is beyond any darkness or ignorance. Only by knowing Him you can conquer death and suffering. I don't know of any other way".(Yajur Veda)

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If you study and learn the knowledge contained in Vedas and live your life according to its teaching, like a loving and nurturing mother, it will purify you and grant all your wishes and desires. Living your life in concert with this divine knowledge, you will have long life, good physical mental and spiritual health, good children, land and cattle, wealth and enduring fame.

Q. If I receive these gifts in life by living my life according to Vedas, will I become peaceful and happy?

A. No, by acquiring these gifts, you will sometime have happiness, sometimes unhappiness and develop great attachments to material things.

Q. How can I have everlasting peace, joy and bliss?

A. Whatever you have acquired in your life whether by your efforts or by grace of God, give it away for the good of people in need and meditate upon the word of God. That is the only way towards eternal bliss.

Q. What are Vedas and other Scriptures that are considered to be the testimony of an expert in spiritual matters?

A. Vedas constitute the most ancient and original body of work in existence on earth. They are the most trusted and venerated books since antiquity in India. The word Veda is a Sanskrit word, which literally means knowledge. Vedas are a series of four books known as Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda. In ancient Indian tradition the knowledge is considered to be divinely inspired.

After human beings were created, these four Vedas were taught and disseminated by four Seers. God revealed the four Vedas; Rigveda to Seer Agni, Yajurveda to Seer Vayu, Samveda to Seer Aaditya and Atharvaveda in the soul of Seer Angira.

Q. Why should He have revealed the Vedas to those four men alone and not to others as well? That implies favoritism in God.

A. Among all men, those four alone were the most advanced Yogis purest in thought, speech and actions and capable of understanding the absolute knowledge and then teaching it to the mankind.

Q. Why did He reveal the Vedas in Sanskrit instead of in the language of some particular country?

A. In the beginning, there was no country and Sanskrit is the original language which is the mother of all other languages. It does not belong to any particular country and with some amount of effort; anybody can learn and understand it.

Q. There is no need for Vedas to be revealed by God. Men can by themselves by degrees augment their knowledge and therefore write these books.

A. I disagree. There can be no effect without a cause. Look at the primitive tribes. Do they become enlightened by themselves without being instructed? Similarly had not God instructed those Sages in the knowledge of Vedas and had not they in turn taught other men, all men would have remained ignorant.

If a child was kept in a sequestered place from its birth and given food but no other company, he would remain ignorant. Yoga Shastra by Sage Patanjali says," As in the present time we become enlightened only after being taught by our teachers, so were in the beginning of the world, Agni, Vayu, Aaditya and Angira were taught by the Greatest of all teacher-God."

His knowledge is eternal .He is not like the human beings who are ignorant when they are born, learn from their teacher and lose this knowledge due to illness or in profound sleep everyday and completely after death. If I ask you," where did you learn?" You will say," from my teacher of course!" Where did your teacher receive his knowledge? Well we can keep on going back in time. God is the Original Teacher in whom the knowledge is eternal, and there is no ebb and flow of wisdom.

Whether you believe that Vedas are divinely inspired are not, it is of no importance. I realize that all religions claim that their scriptures are inspired by God. There is no need to be bogged down in an argument which is very hard to settle. I strongly urge my readers to become familiar with the writings and teachings contained in Vedas because they are universal, non sectarian, timeless and full of true knowledge.

Q. What is written in Vedas?

A. All four Vedas have verses or Mantras. The world mantra means a thought or an idea.

Q. How many verses each of the Veda contain?

A. The Rigveda has 1028 hymns containing total of 10,589 mantras or verses. They have been arranged in two sorts of classifications;

One divides them amongst eight khandas (portions) or more popularly called ashṭakas (eights); each of which is again divided into eight adhyayas (chapters).

The other classification puts the hymns under ten mandalas (books or circles) subdivided into 85 anuvakas (subsections). There is a further subdivision of hymns into 2424 Vargas or paragraphs of about five stanzas each and this subdivision into Vargas is common to both classifications.

The hymns are of various extents: in one instance the hymn consists of a single verse; hymn 164 of the first book has as many as 52 verses.

Yajurveda has 1975 verses spread over forty chapters known as adhyayas (chapters). The biggest chapter is twelfth with 117 verses; the shortest chapter is 39^{th} with 13 verses.

Samveda or the Veda of Divine Songs ranks third in the usual order of enumeration of the Vedas, but in sanctity and liturgical importance it is next to Rigveda. Samveda is a collection made up of hymns, portions of hymns, and detached verses, taken mainly from the Rigveda, transposed and rearranged without reference to their original order. The Samveda contains in all 1875 verses.

The verses of the Samveda have been classified in a number of ways:

(a) According to one system, the whole text has been classified into two parts (archikas), the Purvarchika or part one and the Uttararchika or part two. Part one is divided into six prapathakas or books; then each book has been subdivided into two chapters (adhyayas). Then each chapter has been

divided into five Dasatis or segments of ten verses each; except the last chapter has only four Dasatis. Thus in Purvarchika (part one) there are 585 verses.

(b) In the Uttararchika or part two, we have 9 prapathakas or books. The books one to five have two chapters each, i.e. in all 10 chapters; the chapters six to nine have, however, three chapters each, totaling to 12. Thus the Uttararchika has in all 22 chapters. It mostly consists of triads or a hymn of 3 verses. There are 1225 verses in part two of Samveda. Other authorities have included in this list an Aranyaka Kanda of 55 verses and the Mahanamnyarchika of 10 mantras (verses) completing the total of 1875 verses.

Atharvaveda- The fourth Veda is a collection of 5957 verses spread over twenty chapters. The Veda is divided into Prapathakas or lectures, Anuvakas or recitations, Suktas or hymns and Richas or verses.

Q. How were Vedas preserved during the thousands of years?

The accepted belief in India is that originally the four Vedas were given to four Seers and Yogis during highest stage of meditation. Their names have been mentioned in this chapter. Each one of them taught the other three Vedas to each other.

Their first student was Brahma who was a great Yogi and a scholar in all four Vedas. Even today if a scholar knows all four Vedas, he is called a Brahma. Brahma is also one of the many names of God because the knowledge of four Vedas remains in Him for all times whereas in human beings the knowledge has its ebbs and tides.

Thereafter there were many schools where Vedas were taught from teachers to deserving students who showed great aptitude and interest in the spiritual knowledge. In order to safeguard and preserve the Vedas, they were written down in Sanskrit and also many scholarly families were assigned to memorize one of the Vedas and the society took care of their personal and financial needs.

Even to this day, there are families where father recites Veda all day when his children are listening to him and memorizing it

with or without completely understanding the meanings of the verses. If the family remembers two Vedas, they were called Dvivedies (literally knower of two Vedas). Similarly Trivedi and Chaturvedi Families were known.

This is exactly like the famous novel Fahrenheit 451 by author Ray Bradbury where motivated scholars memorized literary classics to preserve them for posterity. That is why through millenniums of natural and man made catastrophes, scholars could go back to these families and never lose the scriptures.

Even today in South India, there are families who recite one Veda every day and have passed it on through many generations. Whenever there is dispute or disagreement between Vedic scholars, these living repositories of knowledge are called upon to settle the arguments with good logic and reasonable interpretations of the sacred texts.

Q. What are the subjects discussed in the four Vedas?

The Vedas are considered as the root source of all kinds of knowledge whether it is worldly or spiritual. Three main categories are:

A- Knowledge,

B- Actions based on that knowledge (Karma)

C- Self Realization through spiritual science of Yoga.

The subjects e.g., whether there is God, how was universe formed, primordial particles, presence of souls, laws of Karma, Reincarnation etc. are discussed in great details because they are not part of ordinary human experience.

Other subjects like agriculture, organization of society, duties of members of a community, root knowledge of mathematics, physical and biological sciences are also described. For example there is an exhortation," O scholars, it is possible to fly through the air in special vehicles. By studying birds, material sciences and source of energy, airplanes can be made for fast travels for the good of the society".

Now there are few mantras describing how a plane can be made. Naturally the scholars with engineering aptitudes will have to

work out the details and will require great teamwork between many intelligent people trained in different sciences, community financial support etc. This sort of worldly knowledge is usually hinted at and people will have to use their brain and hard work to achieve those ends

Rigveda is considered as mainly a book of knowledge about different topics but on a secondary level it also mentions appropriate actions to make the best use of the knowledge and also reminds us of our highest duty to meditate upon God and realize Him.

Yajurveda mainly deals with translating all the knowledge into actions thus providing us a noble blue print of life which includes helping and serving your fellow human beings as well as never lose sight of the Divine purpose of life to see and know God.

Samveda discusses the Spiritual science of Yoga but on secondary levels teaches us knowledge as well as guidance for good Karmas in life.

The fourth Veda (Atharvaveda) discusses all those topics and answers questions raised in the Text.

Q. Where can you study if you want to read them in original Sanskrit?

A. Modern Sanskrit taught in Sanskrit colleges in India or abroad is not adequate to properly understand and interpret the Vedas. Most of the words used in languages of the world usually refer to one object. Modern Sanskrit also follows the same idea. For example, if you refer to the water, different languages have a word for it e.g., agua in Spanish, jal in Sanskrit etc.

In Vedic Sanskrit, there is this concept of multiple meanings of root words. In other words, a word like Agni can have many meanings e.g., fire, energy, electricity, scholar, leader and finally God. This is very important point. Also, the Grammar of Vedas is very different from ordinary Sanskrit. In order to properly understand and interpret the Vedas, you have to study Ashtadhyayi written by the Seer Panini and Mahabhashya (Great Commentaries) by Patanjali.

Unfortunately many Indian and Western Scholars have tried to interpret Vedas after studying modern Sanskrit and they have made serious mistakes in their interpretations. In nineteenth century, a great scholar and yogi Dayananda revived the study of Vedas and laid out a framework to correctly understand and interpret this Divine Knowledge. There are special schools where Vedas are taught with correct grammar in India.

Q. Can you give some examples of the kind of ideas and teachings in Vedas?

A. I will write the meanings of some mantras (verses) briefly.

a- God is one though variously described; (Rigveda 1.164.46). God alone is one, though known as Agni, King, Judge, Creator and Friend etc. He is one, though seers call him with various names.

The same verse lends itself to a second meaning The energy is one but many people call it by different names e.g., fire, electricity, light, matter etc.

b- God is one and only one. He is not two, not three, not four, not five, not six, not seven, not eight, and not nine. He is not zero either but knower of zero. (Atharvaveda13.4.16-18). The same verse is considered to be root mantra for mathematics.

c- There are two birds with beautiful wings (God and soul- two conscious entities), they are of the same age (eternal, never born and never die) perching on the same tree (tree represents the cosmos that God permeates and souls use). One of the two birds (soul) enjoys the bitter and sweet fruits of the tree, while the other bird (God) simply watches the other without ever needing, desiring or partaking of the fruits of the tree (cosmos). Rigveda1.164.20.

d- Atharvaveda5.1.2.- When a person does righteous karma in one life with thought, speech and actions, he indeed receives a healthy body, great intellect and many blessings in the next life through the justice of God. This is one of the many verses describing reincarnation.

e- There are many verses in Rigveda and Atharvaveda about

nutrition, herbal medicines and their uses, hygiene etc. Incidentally, there is strict prohibition against eating meat because it involves violence and great cruelty towards other living beings, also Vedas advise against mind altering products like alcohol, narcotics etc., except for medicinal use.

f- Yajurveda.1.5.- I pray to you O Lord, give me the mental strength to never tell a lie and always speak the truth in my thoughts, speech and actions.

g- Yajurveda. 36.18.- O lord, the dispeller of ignorance, give me peace of mind. May all living beings regard me as their friend! May I see all beings as my friend! May we never betray this sacred bond of trust!

h- Atharvaveda- O men, earn wealth with hundreds of hands but do share it with deserving people and give it away with thousands of hands. Wealth in Vedas means Spirituality, healthy mind and body, education, and of course material wealth in the form of land, cattle, food stuffs, money etc.,and the greatest gift is education and the highest is the gift of Yogic knowledge.

I hope this has aroused some curiosity in you; my dear readers, and you will try to learn and enjoy the priceless and timeless wisdom and knowledge in Vedas.

Q. What other books are based on or derived from Vedas?

A. According to the tradition, after the Vedas were revealed to four seers, they disseminated this knowledge and it has been passed on from various teachers to their disciples. Based on the knowledge of Vedas, many scholars wrote upon many different subjects whether spiritual or worldly.

a. The first group of books are called Brahmanas. History tells us that at one time there were 1127 different schools of Brahmanas where commentaries upon Vedas were expounded. Unfortunately, most of that literature is lost. Only four Brahmanas are available.

Aitreya Brahman consists of commentaries on Rigveda.

Shatapatha, Sama, and Gopatha Brahmanas are related to Yajurveda, Samveda, and Atharvaveda respectively.

b. The second group of books are called Upvedas or sub Vedas. They are four in numbers-

1- Ayurveda (health sciences)- Herein are included the works of Charak and Sushruta, two great physicians and other sages. These books describe medicines, surgery, hygiene, and dietetics, use of Yoga to obtain physical, mental and spiritual health.

2- Dhanurveda (science of government)- Civil part deals with the art of governing people, protecting their property and lives, developing the wealth and resources of the country, making people secure and contented by administration of law and order in society. Manusamriti describes it in great detail.

   Military part comprises of organization of army, use of fire arms etc. to provide safe and secure borders by guarding against external threats The original book has been lost.

3- Ghandervaveda (art of music)- this was derived from Samveda. The verses were sung in religious functions. Music was also developed –vocal and instrumental-for secular occasions. The only surviving book on this subject is Narad Samhita.

4- Arthveda (science and financial studies)-This sub Veda described study of matter, laws of nature and derive useful practical applications from that knowledge for the good of the society. There was description of financial management of economy also, but this book is not available.

These six books are necessary to properly interpret and understand Vedas.

1- Phonetics (shiksha) written by sage Panini, it teaches phonetics and their correct pronunciation.

2- Grammar (Vyakarana)- This includes Ashtadhyayi(of eight chapters) written by sage Panini. It also contains Dhatupath (book of roots), Ganpath (book of groups), and Unadikosh (book of prefixes and suffixes).

In his book Mahabhashya, sage Patanjali has written explanations and commentaries about the four books of grammar by Panini. Intensive study of grammar is essential to understand and correctly interpret Vedas.

3- Nighantu and Nirukta (books on Vedic vocabulary and philology) by sage Yaskacharya.

4- Prosody (Chhandograntha) written by sage Pingala teaches the rules that govern the versification of Vedic verses.

The six schools of Philosophy

1- Sankhya Shastra written by Kapil Muni. This book describes the details of creation of the Cosmos.

2- Yoga Shastra by Patanjali. This is the most authoritative work about the spiritual science of Yoga. Sage Patanjali describes the practical steps necessary for Self Realization and direct experience of God.

3- Nyaya Shastra by sage Gautama. This describes various logical ways of investigating any idea or belief system.

4- Vaisheshika Shastra by sage Kanada. This book describes atomic structure, the laws of cause and effect etc

5- Purva Mimansa by sage Jaimini. This book writes about laws of Karma, various types of Karma and their results.

6- Uttar Mimansa or Vedanta by sage Vyasa. This book describes about God, souls, matter and spirituality.

All the six schools revere Vedas and are completely in harmony with the teachings in the Vedas

There are eleven Upanishadas which describe in detail the spiritual science of Yoga and how to live a Divine life for Self Realization. Upanishada literally means getting close to God. Their names are:

1. Ishopanishada (40th chapter of Yajurveda)
2. Kenopanishada
3. Kathopnishada
4. Prashanopanishada
5. Mundakopanishada
6. Mandukyopanishada

7. Aitreyaupnishada
8. Tettrayaupnishada
9. Chhandogyaupnishada
10. Brihadarayapnishada
11. Shevashavaropnishada.

These are timeless classics and many modern scholars have written commentaries on Upanishadas.

Manu Samriti

It was written by sage Manu, the giver of laws that govern all human conduct and interrelationship between different members of the society. This book describes in detail the rights and duties of scholars, administration officials, businessmen and other skilled and non skilled workers.

Unfortunately, about 4000 years ago, some corrupt Brahmin scholars added some verses to the original text to justify and perpetuate the present day caste system prevalent in India. They were using the authority of this much revered scholar to justify their corrupt belief system.

But if you carefully read the Manusamriti, it will be obvious to any impartial observer that Manu never condoned caste by birth, untouchability, denial of education to women and so called lower caste people. Sadly this ignorant and reprehensible customs still persist in modern day India.

Many so-called scholars have not read the original text of Manusamriti and still have maligned his name holding him responsible for the mistreatment of millions of people in India. In my opinion, the critics of sage Manu need to read his original text. Manu Samriti is a basic constitution illustrating how to govern and create a just society.

Ramayana was written by Valmiki Rishi. This describes Indian history and is a great moral tale.

Mahabharata was written by sage Vyasa. He writes about a civil war that happened about 5100 years ago.

One part of this epic is very famous and is called Bhagvad Geeta.

Bhagvad Geeta is very revered book in India and a timeless classic. Sage Vyasa uses the background of the civil war in

Mahabharata to teach us how to lead a Divine Life. Geeta is also very useful guide to the sacred practice of four kinds of Yoga. It is a masterpiece of knowledge about the Karma Yoga. There are many commentaries written about Bhagvad Geeta by many scholars.

If you want to do some additional reading about the subjects, I highly recommend books by Swami Dayananda, a great scholar and a Yogi. He wrote Satyarth Prakash (the light of truth), Vedadi Bhashya Bhumika (discussions of teachings in Vedas), interpretations of Rigveda and Yajurveda. Many of his lectures, his life story and religious debates have been preserved and are very instructive for the spiritually inclined.

Translations of all four Vedas are available in English but in my opinion they fail to capture the true essence of Vedas. Somebody needs to do a better quality translation.

This is a vast subject and we have only scratched the surface. We will provide a bibliography for interested readers.

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Cosmology according to Vedas. Who created it? How old is it?

Before the creation, only Om was present and aware. Except for emancipated souls, the Primordial particles were inactive and souls were in deep sleep. Om is the true Master of the cosmos. From the earth to the sun to the whole universe, He created it all. Let us all bow down and worship Him. (Rig Veda chapter 8-7, Valli 3 Verse 1.)

There are many mantras (verses) in Vedas explaining how the cosmos came to be. In Rigveda verse 10.129.3 describes the condition before the start of creation. The verse states," In the beginning the whole was enveloped in utter darkness. Nothing was discernible. It was like a dark night, Matter was in its elementary form. It was like empty space. The whole of universe, completely covered by darkness, was insignificantly small compared with the Infinite God who by His infinite power evolved this visible world-the effect- out of the elementary matter- the cause." Sankhya Shastra written by the sage Kapil also has written in great detail about the steps in the creation of the universe in his treatise.

In scriptures from India, there is a great emphasis on this fact that any serious student of Yoga must first understand the process of creation, its purpose and man's place in the scheme of things. There is a famous saying in Upanishadas that goes like this," Yatha Pinde-Tatha Brahamande." This means that the material that has been used to create the universe has also been utilized in formation of our own bodies. Therefore, the Material Cause that formed the universe can also be investigated by concentrating our mind and intellect on ourselves during the higher stages of Yoga. This is similar to how Einstein; the great theoretical physicist of our times had carried out thought experiments during stages of deep concentrations likes of which great Yogis are capable of achieving.

Let me list the steps in creation as written by sage Kapil in Sankhya Shastra.

1. This book (Sankhya Shastra) is being written to free mankind from all kinds of suffering.
2. In order to permanently rid oneself of physical, mental, spiritual suffering, one should be able to distinguish between what is conscious, alert; aware (Purusha-God or souls) as opposed to what is inert, nonliving, and lacking consciousness (Prakriti-matter). This is called special knowledge (Viveka).
3. Inability to discern between these two entities is called the Main Ignorance (Aaviveka). That is the root cause of all of our sufferings.
4. The knowledge of creation is a most useful aid in getting rid of this ignorance.
5. Before the creation, the Matter, the material cause of the universe was in the form of primordial particles. The particles were particulate, carried either a positive charge (Sattva Guna) or a negative charge (Rajo Guna) or no charge (Tamo Guna). The primordial particles have therefore three qualities; attraction between oppositely charged particles, repulsion between similarly charged particles and neutrality or absence of above two qualities. Due to an external power called Prana exerted by God on these particles, they were inert and non-reactive amongst each other. This is also called a stage of equilibrium.
6. The first step in creation was breaking or dissolution of this state of equilibrium. How did this happen? A nonliving, inert material cannot do this by itself .So we have to accept that it was done by a very powerful conscious entity or being. This step was extraordinary. This change happened in uncountable particles at the same time. Compared to the immensity of this step, rest of the creation is relatively less significant.
7. Once equilibrium was gone, the particles started to react amongst one another and formed slightly larger combinations. This first effect is called Mahat Tattva (Quarks?). Mahat Tattva is subatomic stage of the matter and also may carry net positive, negative or neutral charge.

According to the author, Mahat Tattva is used in human body to make the Astral Body also known as Microscopic Body (Suksham Sharir). Briefly, the Astral Body is the seat of past memories and knowledge. It envelops the soul and travels with it from life to life in the cycles of reincarnations. The Astral Body forms the liaison between the Soul (conscious entity) on the one hand and the body (made up of matter) on the other hand.

8. In the next step, Mahat Tattva forms even larger groupings and three types of Ahankara are created.

9. a- Vaikarik Ahankara is Sato Guni-with positive charge(=Proton).

   b- Tejus Ahankara is Rajo Guni and carries negative charge(==Electron)

   c- Bhutadi Ahankara has no charge and is Tamo Guni(=Neutron).

   These Ahankaras are used to form the microscopic representations of five senses of knowledge (sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch) and five senses of motor functions (speech, hands, reproductive organs, elimination organ and feet) on the Astral Body.

10. When Ahankaras are created, five subtle forces are also created which are needed to bind the Ahankaras in to Parimandalas (atoms). Up to this step, creation is called Aavishesh (non specific) but once atoms are created, the creation is called Vaishashik (specific).

11. These Parimandalas (atoms) are combined in different permutations and combinations to form Suksham Bhut (molecules), which are further aggregated by Divine Intelligence to make Sthool Bhut (visible world).

12. Primordial particles are unconscious, inert and have no free will (Jarh) and any combinations of these no matter how sophisticated remain inert and unconscious. Therefore the Astral

body and our gross body are made up of matter, which is unconscious and inert (Jarh). Sage Kapil states that he has thought over it very carefully and has come to a definite conclusion that inert, unconscious particles can never become conscious, alert and aware (Chetan) and vice versa. That line cannot be crossed.

13. It is the Soul that is alert, aware, conscious entity (Chetan), which by its presence makes Astral Body and gross body come alive. In fact when soul enters the body, it is called birth and when it departs, the body dies. The Soul has the power of decision, discretion, direction and free will. The creation has been made for the use of the Souls. That is the purpose of creation.

14. God is the efficient cause or the Creator of the universe. Because matter being unconscious and lacking intelligence cannot form itself into an intelligent creation.

    It will require a separate book to do justice to this great body of work. His method of investigation is deep meditation during highest stages of Yoga. He also states that his conclusions about creation are similar to what is written in the Vedas.

Q. **How old is the creation?**

A. There are two counting systems in Vedic Scriptures

1. The time when creation is manifest is called a day of Brahma. When the visible universe is broken down into primordial particles, this period is called the night of Brahma.

   The day or night consists of one thousand Chatur Yugis (four periods). Each Chatur Yugi has four Yugas (periods). They are Sat Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwaper Yuga and Kali Yuga.

   Kali Yuga has 432,000 years.

   Dwaper Yuga contains twice as many years i.e., 864,000 years.

   Treta Yuga has three times the years in Kali Yuga i.e., 1,296,000 years.

   The Sat Yuga has four times as many i.e., 1,728,000 years.

   A Chatur Yugi thus consists of 4,320,000 years. A day of

Brahma is one Chatur Yugi times one thousand gives us the number of 4.32 billion years. The night of Brahma is also 4.32 billion years long.

2. The 4.32 billion years are divided in to fourteen Manvantras (Periods). Seventy-one Chatur Yugis equal one Manvantra, which has 306,720,000 years. From the beginning of the present creation, six Manvantras have passed. Their names are Svayambhava, Swarochish, Ottami, Tamas Raivat, and Chakshus. The present Manvantra is called Vaivastva and seven more Manvantras are yet to come. Of the present Manvantra Vaisvastva, twenty-seven Chatur Yugis have passed. Of the 28^{th} Chatur Yugi, Sat Yuga, Treta and Dwaper Yugas are gone. Right now we are in Kali Yuga and about 5200 years have passed. 432,000 years minus 5200 years of Kali Yuga are left.

For thousands of years, whenever some special occasions are celebrated or if an author writes a book, they always start by introducing themselves, their family, the purpose of their book or occasion and they narrate in detail about the time when they are celebrating or writing.

It goes something like this," With the grace of God, and blessings of my parents and teachers, I so and so, son of so and so, belonging to such and such family, am writing this book about so and so subject. I am starting this book in seventh Vaivastva Manvantra, 28^{th} Chatur Yugi, so and so year of Kali Yuga, in the month of so and so, on this day, at this time. I pray that Almighty God may guide my noble effort."

Also in various parts of the country, many Brahmin families publish Panchang (Almanac) to inform people of special holidays, and positions of moon etc., and they have kept an accurate count of this system.

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Four stages of life and four divisions of society

God created the World and everything in it. Who did He create from His mouth (bearing high qualities)? Who did he create from His arms (bearing strength)? Who did He create from His abdomen (bearing medium qualities)? Who did He produce from His feet?

From His command, those who are knowledgeable, truthful and spiritual, He made them Brahmins. Those who are strong, brave, protect the innocent and punish the criminals are the Kshtriayas. People who perform agriculture and business were made Vaishyas. Those lacking above qualities were called Shudras.

In the ancient Vedic times, the society was divided into four loose groups. They were called Brahmin, Kshatria, Vaishya and Shudra. This division was made on the basis of an individual's qualifications, actions and nature. This division is timeless and exists in every society and culture even though the terminology may be different.

According to Manu Samriti, it is the duty of the governing entities to make sure that every child, male or female, gets equal opportunity for education supported by the state and its citizens. There were separate schools for the boys and girls. These were called Gurukul (home of Guru-teacher). These were located away from the cities and the schools were very generously funded by the state with money, land and domestic cattle.

The students lived in Gurukul in exactly the same circumstances regardless of the status or wealth of their parents. The King's son may be assigned the duty of chopping wood for the community kitchen or asked to clean up the barn etc. The teachers looked upon the children in their charge as their own children. The teachers were fair, strict and very caring. After the students completed their education, they were assigned into one of these four Varnas (groups), Brahmin, Kshatria, Vaishya or Shudra .Let us review the qualities necessary to belong to these categories:

1. **Brahmin**-Those students, who were very religious, showed great scholarship in the study of Vedas and related scriptures, loved to learn themselves and teach others were called Brahmins. Many of them would be on the advisory councils of the state and were responsible for setting up teaching institutions. They received salaries from the state. They were the most revered and respected in the society. The modern day parallel would be teachers, scientists, research scholars, priests, rabbis, thinkers, philosophers etc. Brahmins preserved, interpreted and taught Vedas and science of Yoga too.

2. **Kshatria**- those students who were strong, fearless, leaders of fellow men with an aptitude for administration and knowledge of martial sciences were called Kshatria or warrior class. Thus the King, his administration and military commanders would come out of this group of people. It was incumbent upon them to adhere strictly to fairness, justice and great respect and compassion for the other members of the society. The modern counter parts of Kshatria are obvious.

3. **Vaishya**- those students who showed an aptitude for business or agriculture were called Vaishyas. They paid taxes and donated money etc. to support the society. Manu Samriti clearly states that the tax should be between $1/16^{th}$ to $1/10^{th}$ of the income or produce. And during the famine or other hardships, it was the duty of the administration to not only waive the taxes but also help them during difficult times.

4. **Shudra**- having received equal opportunity for education, if an individual, whether due to lack of intelligence or interest or aptitude, failed to do well in learning, they were called Shudras. They worked for and were paid by the other three groups of the society. The modern day example will be people who work in factories, agriculture and service industries.

These Varnas (groupings) were based on the person's qualifications, actions and nature. They were, as at present times, very fluid divisions. They changed as the qualifications of the person changed. There is a beautiful verse in Vedas; it states,

If you imagine the whole society as a human body, then the head (seat of brain) is the Brahmin, the arms are the Kshatria (they rush forward to protect the other parts of the body in case of danger even while risking injury to themselves), the abdomen is Vaishya (digests, stores the nutrition but then doesn't hoard it but shares it with all parts of the body) and the legs are the Shudras which serve all the other members of the society. Now it is clear to anyone that all parts of the body (society) are very important.

Manu Samriti states: Brahmin becomes Shudra and Shudra can become Brahmin if he works hard to acquire the necessary knowledge. It is also true of Kshatrias and Vaishyas.

There was no discrimination amongst any of these Varnas (groups). All their children went to similar schools and could freely move in to other Varna. For example, child of a factory worker may become a teacher, military leader or a businessman depending upon his aptitude and knowledge.

Unfortunately, about 3500 years ago, Brahmins in ancient India became powerful and misused their power to the detriment of the rest of the society. They stopped studying Vedas or teaching them and decreed that a person's Varna (Group) is based upon his birth rather than his qualifications, actions and character.

This led to great rigidity and ossification of the institutions of the society. This sadly gave rise to extreme mistreatment of the Shudras and women denying them education, ability to better themselves and in the process caused great harm to the society. This horrible practice still persists to this day in India but great progress has been made due to the efforts of many great reformers including Mahatma Ghandi.

It should be clear to any impartial observer that the mistreatment of Shudras and women was never sanctioned by Vedas or Manu Samriti but was the result of great corruption and abuse of the power by some very selfish and corrupt Brahmins.

Vedas and Manu Samriti also divide a man's life in to four stages. Assuming the life span of human beings to be one hundred

years, it was divided into four periods of twenty-five years each. Let us examine these four stages.

1. **Brahmcharya**—This included first twenty-five years of life. First eight years were spent with the family. The mother was the first teacher, father the second. At eight years of age, the child was sent to the Guru Kul (school) for education. They were called Brahmachari (literally means one who lives in God). They were called Dwija (twice born) because first birth was physical birth by the parents and the second birth was by the teacher by providing spiritual and intellectual awakening. Incidentally the word Dwija (twice born) is also used for the tooth because first we have milk tooth and later the permanent tooth.

The Brahamcharis were required to be chaste, honest, hard working and devoted to acquiring knowledge. They performed two spiritual duties every day; Brahma Yajya- prayer to and meditation upon God, studying Vedas and other scriptures, and Dev Yajya-A fire ceremony to purify the environment twice a day. This was definitely not fire worship but use of fire for a specific purpose. The Brahamcharis, after completing their education may chose to continue studying or at age twenty-five returned to their families and could enter the second stage of life.

2. **Grihastha Ashram**—In the second stage of life, the individual got married, pursued his chosen profession and raised the family. There were five sacred duties (Yajyas) that every married person was supposed to perform every day.

a. *Brahma Yajya*-Morning and evening, every one was supposed to pray to and meditate upon God, study and follow the precepts of Vedas and related scriptures.

b. *Dev Yajya*- Fire ceremony, purification of air and water, chanting of verses of Vedas.

c. *Pitri Yajya*- Respecting and taking care of the needs of the parents, relatives and teachers.

d. *Atithi Yajya*- Atithi literally means a guest who does not have a fixed date of arrival. This is the sacred duty of the Grihastha (married couple) to receive such guest with utmost courtesy and great hospitality. The proscribed steps are; greet the guest, offer him the best seat in the house, provide him with water to drink or use it to take a bath, offer him a meal appropriate for the hour and provide him room and board. Most of these guests were Vedic scholars and Yogis and then the Grihastha should request the guest to teach him about the Scriptures.

e. *Bali Vaishavadev Yajya*- This Yajya is done before eating a meal with the realization that many people are involved in producing the food that nourishes us, therefore one should share it with other needy and unfortunate individuals. So the prepared food is divided into six portions and given to

1. dogs etc
2. poor and starving
3. those suffering from sexually transmitted diseases or addictions
4. lepers and those suffering from incurable diseases
5. birds,
6. and insects. Thus the Grihastha served as a local, compassionate keeper of his fellow human beings

3. Van Prastha- According to Manu Samriti, when you reach fifty years of age, a grandchild has been born, hair is turning gray and the skin is showing wrinkles, the Grihastha should enter Van Prastha Ashram (retreat) with his wife if she wants to go with him or alone if she chooses to stay with her children. This period between fifty to seventy-five years is time to serve the community with the skills you have learned in your life time without expectation of financial gain, contemplate, reflect, meditate and learn and practice Yoga. During Van Prastha, you are supposed to do Brahma Yajya and Dev Yajya.

4. **Sanyas Ashram**- This last stage extends from 75 years to death. But you have to be worthy of entering this sacred stage. Sage Manu states that only those individuals should enter Sanyas Ashram who are advanced Yogis and have renounced Puttareshana (all sensual desires in thought, speech and action), Vitteshana (desire for acquisition of money in thought, speech and action) and Lokeshana (desire to be famous) completely. The Sanyasis do not possess or keep money, live as guests of the Grihasthas, teach about Vedas, other scriptures and Yoga. If you are spiritually ready, a Brahmachari or a Grihastha can enter into Sanyas Ashram and if not worthy, Van Prastha may not join the order.

I want to point out an interesting observation about this life plan. Only the Vaishyas during Grihastha (married life) engaged in agriculture and commerce. They created wealth, supported and sustained the society. The Brahmins and Kshatrias performed their duties. The Shudras were employed by all three Varnas (Groups). The relentless pursuit of money was discouraged and people were encouraged to seek spirituality and serve your fellow human beings.

Thus I have given my readers a glimpse into a life plan, which is followed by thousands of people in India even to this day.

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The Laws Of Karma

O unexpected suffering, you are most welcome! I fully realize what you presence means; I must have committed some sins recently or in the past. When I have performed bad Karmas, it stops my spiritual progress until I have endured punishment for my misdeeds. Therefore sufferings are sent by God to cleanse and purify us. God had punished me in the past but I did not learn my lessons. You are very painful and I am afraid. But I realize that God only punishes us to improve us just as our parents disciplined us out of their great love for us. O great suffering, cleanse me, purify me so I can continue my spiritual journey.

> *Based on your Karmas whether they are good or bad, you will be rewarded or punished. There is no escape.*
>
> (Bhagvad Geeta.)

The philosophy of Karma is discussed in the Vedas, Upanishadas and in Bhagwad Geeta.

Q. What is Karma?

There is definite cause and effect in the material world and the laws of the physical world govern those actions. A human being is a combination of a Soul (conscious entity), an Astral Body and the gross body made from inert and unconscious matter. Whenever he performs an action, it is called Karma.

Q. What are the different kinds of Karmas?

Three kinds of Karmas are described; a- Akam (actions for survival), b-Sakam Karma (actions done with desire and expectation of reward or gain), c-Nishkam Karma (detached actions).

a. Akam Karma-These actions include eating, bathing, sleeping etc. and while they may be beneficial or harmful to the doer, there is no significant influence of these actions on others.

b. Sakam Karmas are those actions, performed with free will, with a desire for a gain or expectations of a worldly benefit. These actions can be good or bad and in the long run, cause happiness or sorrow to the individual. You are free in doing Karma but once it is done, you will have to accept its just consequence. You cannot escape the results of your action.

c. Nishkam Karma- These are actions performed by the individuals as a moral or ethical duty with the greatest good of humanity. They do not expect any monetary reward or fame in return for their actions. These wonderful people are the treasures of this world. Universal love and justice motivate them. An example would be Mahatma Gandhi in recent times.

Q. Tell me more about Sakam Karmas!

A-The sequence of Sakam Karmas (with a desire or expectations of results) is very elegantly described in Bhagwad Geeta, chapter 2 verses 62 and 63.

Desires appear when we think about pleasures or things or come in contact with them

1. As we are thinking about worldly pleasures or when we come in contact with them, a desire appears within us to acquire them. For example, I am going for a walk and I see an elegant mansion or a nice car or a beautiful lady, two reactions are possible. Either it has no effect on me and I move on or a desire appears in me where I wish I owned the house or the car or hope that I was acquainted with the lovely lady. The desire can be for living or nonliving things. Desire (Kama) is the first defect of mind, which is an important part of Astral Body.

   Obstruction in the path of desire= Anger, irritation or frustration

2. Next as I go about trying to satisfy my desire, two outcomes can occur. If I am successful, I feel happy for some time and another desire comes up in my mind. If I fail, I become resentful and angry. As new desires keep cropping up, sooner or later some of my desires are going to find obstruction, frustration or competition from other people who are seeking similar things and I am going to end up angry too. In fact, most of the people have more unsatisfied desires than otherwise, therefore most of the people we meet have varying degrees of resentment, frustrations or outright anger. Anger (Krodha) is the second defect of mind. As day follows night, unsatisfied desires lead to anger.

   Satisfaction of desires (run of good luck)=Greed (Lobha)

3. We also have met or heard of some people who seem to have a great run of fortune and many of their desires for sex, money or fame are satisfied for a while. Then the person develops a hankering for more, more and more acquisitions. This leads to greed (Lobha), the third defect of mind.

   When we acquire many "things" (living or non living), we develop Attachment (Moh)

4. When we become "owners" of many things, living or nonliving, we become very attached to them. We don't want to lose them. This state, the fourth defect of mind, is called attachment (Moha).

   When we think we are better than others=Pride and arrogance (Ahankara)

5. When we think that we are better than someone else on account of our looks, possessions, color of our skin etc., we develop the fifth defect of mind called pride or arrogance(Ahankara).

Most of the people have these defects of mind (Mano Vikaras). Under the influence of these limitations or ignorance, we perform Sakam Karmas (Performed for gain or with expectations). For example, if it in my power to appoint someone for an important position; the right thing to do is to find the most qualified person for the job regardless of the person's caste, color or creed. But due to the defect of attachment (Moha), I may give this job to someone that I like or someone who is recommended to me by my friends even though they may not be the most suitable for the job.

Similarly other defects of mind influence our actions every day and some Karmas are honest and others are dishonest. Having performed Karma with my free will, I will have to face the consequences of my actions and good deeds bring physical, mental or spiritual happiness. And if we see someone with sufferings in life, we can easily realize that the person must have caused physical, mental or spiritual pain to other people or living things either in this or previous life. We may easily escape human justice but we cannot get away with bad Karmas without being punished for it by God, the Supreme Judge.

Q. We see all around us that good people are suffering and bad people are prospering. How does this Law of Karma work?

The Law of Karma can be illustrated by an analogy of banking. Whenever we do good deeds, it is as if we made a deposit in our account. Similarly, bad actions will be equal to making a withdrawal from the account. So when we see a really bad person who appears to be prospering, it is obvious that he must have done many good Karmas either in this life or in previous lives and he still has a positive balance in his Karma account. When he has done many misdeeds, he will deplete

his account and will have a negative balance. Than his punishments in life will start.

The result of our good or bad deeds continues in future lives too. Therefore Geeta says," You have to face the consequences of your Karmas whether they are good or bad. You cannot escape the Divine Justice". This also means that if I have done good Karmas, I will get physical, mental and spiritual happiness in proportions to my actions. God is like a Judge and good actions bring happiness and bad Karmas lead to sufferings. So if you see a bad person prospering, it is clear that his Karma account is in positive balance and if he appears to be getting away with his bad actions, this is only very temporary.

Whenever we do any action, it leaves an imprint in our brain and also in our Astral Body. If that action is performed repeatedly, the imprint gets deeper and leads to a habit. And habits form our character. For example, if a person tries to steal, he is very nervous and fearful the first time around. If he is not caught the first time, he may continue to repeat this action under the influence of the defect of mind of greed (Lobha). He may become a successful thief but he has now started a journey on a path, which is full of dangers and may lead him to prison, fines and or humiliations in life. Because of this bad habit, a person will do many bad Karmas and will suffer either in this life or in next lives.

The multitudes of these imprints form our character traits and influence our Karmas in this life and lives to come and are called Vasanas. These Vasanas give rise to inherent character traits even from an early age. We see that some children are kind and thoughtful while others are mean and selfish. You may say that it is due to genes and the environment in their house and certainly that is very important. But we also see children of same parents and essentially being taught similar values show vastly different physical, mental and spiritual

strengths and weaknesses. For example President Carter and his brother Billy were very different.

Because in life the effort is most important but existence of destiny or luck cannot be denied either. But this much is clear that what we are enjoying in this life without any obvious effort on our part e.g., good health, beauty, being born in a wealthy or famous family, being blessed with great intelligence from birth etc., are all due to our good actions in the past lives. So the effort or good Karma is the prerequisite towards creating good destiny and vice versa. So long as we do Sakam Karmas, we will produce Vasanas (Multitudes of imprints), which in turn influences our behavior and actions. These actions are good or bad and we receive rewards or punishments by the Divine Laws. Thus we are thrust in the endless cycle of life and death.

Q. **If all Karmas produce results and we have to be born and die again and again, isn't it better to be inactive and not perform any Karma?**

A. This was the same question which was posed by Prince Arjuna to Great Yogi and scholar Krishna in the famous book of Bhagwad Geeta. The Lord Krishna answered:

It is impossible for any human being to exist without performing Karmas because the acts of eating, breathing etc. are also included in Karmas. Life is not possible without Karmas. There are two types of Karmas that human beings can perform.

If you perform Sakam Karmas with a desire of gains or expectations of results, they will bind us deeper into the cycle of reincarnations and endless pleasures and sufferings, which are really two sides of the same coin.

In order to have long lasting physical, mental or spiritual happiness and peace, one should understand and perform

Nishkam Karmas (actions performed as a moral and ethical duty without regards of monetary gains or desire for fame). Let us discuss Nishkam Karma.

Nishkam Karma does not equal inactivity

There is a difference between inaction, laziness and Nishkam Karma. While performing Nishkam Karma, the individual works very hard, with great integrity and he is motivated by service, justice and greatest good of people.

To illustrate, let me mention the historical setting in which

Lord Krishna taught Bhagwad Geeta to Prince Arjuna . Price Arjuna and his brothers (Pandavas) were fighting a civil war against their cousin Prince Duryodhana and his brothers (Kaurvas). Lord Krishna was supporting the Padavas. Grandfather Bhishma and teacher Dronacharya were on the side of Kaurvas.

Kaurvas had cheated the Pandvas of their lawfully inherited kingdom. Repeated attempts by Krishna to resolve the conflict peacefully were unsuccessful. Before the start of civil war, Prince Arjuna was filled with remorse and grief and felt that he did not want to fight his cousins, teacher and grandfather. His reasons were:

a. He didn't want to fight his kith and kins with definite possibility of great casualties on both sides.
b. The armies of Kaurvas were larger and more well equipped and he wasn't sure whether his side would win or lose.
c. Best and the brightest people will die and the war will cause great suffering in the land and to the survivors.

Lord Krishna replied:

A. Every body who is born will die one day. We are made up

of a Soul and gross body. The Soul is eternal and body is made up of combinations of primordial particles, which decay every moment and will die in the end any way. And the Soul will be born once again getting a new body. Therefore, from the point of view of the Soul, death is nothing more than a common event when we discard older clothes and put on new clothes.

B. Since an enlightened person sees death as a natural part of life, he never shirks from his responsibility of performing Nishkam Karma no matter what is the cost to his person.

C. The reason he(Krishna) is fighting on the side of Pandavas is not because they are his friends(which they are) but because their cause is just and truth is on their side.

D. Arjuna is worried whether it is worth fighting because the outcome is uncertain and in fact their side may even lose the battle. Lord Krishna explains to him that he is a soldier on the side of truth and justice and doesn't care whether he wins or loses. He will always fight against the forces of evil to the point of self-sacrifice no matter what the final outcome is.

E. Prince Arjuna sees the Kaurvas and is filled with the defect of mind of attachment (Moha), he sees cousins, relatives, uncles, teachers and grandfather and feels helpless to do his duty to fight. Lord Krishna performs Nishkam Karma and with clarity of vision, sees in Kaurvas and their allies, a group of people who are dishonest and cheats and with the equanimity of a judge, he has no qualms against punishing them and slay them if necessary.

1. He is not moved by desire, anger, greed, attachment and pride. And after the eventual victory of Pandavas, he refused to accept any position of power or influence. He thinks

everything through carefully, arrives at his decisions deliberately and once he has decided a moral and ethical course of action, he is willing to sacrifice even his own life in achieving his goal. Thus he performs Nishkam Karma and he is a Karma Yogi.

2. The most famous verse in Geeta, chapter 2, verse 47 says." It is your duty to do Karma but never be fixated on desired result". On the surface, it appears to be contrary to the normal behavior that we see in human beings. Desired result seems to be the motivation of most all of us before we will engage in any action. So why Lord Krishna says that Nishkam Karma is our most sacred and highest duty? Let us examine his reasoning.

a. One of the example of Nishkam Karma is when a good physician treats a patient to the best of his ability in order to make him well but he also knows that the final outcome can never be predicted with certainty. His approach is compassionate and realistic. But if he was treating his own child, he may not be able to accept any failure because he is very attached to the child and desires satisfactory outcome only, but it may or may not happen.

   Similarly, when we raise our children, either we can do it as a sacred duty without any expectations that they will take care of us in our old age or do it as Sakam Karma. Thus we can save ourselves lot of mental grief if our children cannot or do not help us in our need, and if they do, than it will be especially gratifying because unexpected good fortune is always welcome.

b. When we do any karma, Sakam or Nishkam, we will get its result. The only thing is that we have no control over it and it can be favorable or unfavorable. When the result of

Karma is what we wanted, we feel happy and if it is not, we feel miserable. A Sakam Karmi is setting himself for a life of anger, frustration and resentments. Whereas Nishkam Karmi does Karma out of the sense of duty and service and if he does not succeed, he keeps his mental equanimity and is able to analyze his actions and effect a change in his tactics or strategy knowing fully well that one should do his best and leave the result in the hands of God.

c. Whenever we do any Karma and expect a certain desired result, we should realize that there may be many others who may desire the exact same result or worse yet, they may be working against us. The final result that we get will be the resultant of many such desires and therefore cannot be predicted with absolute certainty.

d. The Karma belongs to an individual but the result of Karma involves many other people and factors many of which we may not even be aware of. For example, Hitler and his Nazi Party by various tactics managed to control Germany and for a while they had hopes of ruling the World. In the process, the Nazis committed horrible atrocities against many nations and especially against Jewish people where they (S.S and Gestapo) killed millions of innocent men, women and children. This was their Karma committed with free will. But slowly (in fact too slowly for many victims) and surely, the world woke up to this menace and U.K., U.S.A., and Russia fought and ultimately defeated Hitler's plans. Thus Hitler started this action and the results were totally unexpected. Former allies became enemies; erstwhile enemies (U.S.A, West Germany, Italy and Japan) became friends. U.S.A. replaced U.K. as the leader of the free world. Former colonies of Europe became independent. And despite nefarious efforts of Hitler and his minions to

exterminate Jewish People, State of Israel came into existence miraculously. So you see, result of any action is not always predictable because so many factors are involved.

e. When we perform any Karma, it happens in present time but the result of that action is always in the future whether it is a short interval or after a long time. And future is unknowable and uncertain. Therefore Nishkam Karma point of view is more practical and more efficient.

f. Therefore when a Karma Yogi starts any action, it does not mean that he does not have a desired goal and a well thought out plan in his mind, but first of all he does not want or desire name or fame for himself in return for his efforts and sacrifice and secondly, he realizes that the result may not turn out to be what he wanted and in that case, he bows his head before God and accepts the result as they are.

Q. You say that we have free will but most people do not appear to be free in their actions. Why?

A. Sage Patanjali says in Yoga Shastra that the actions of past life influence and determine three things in your present life; 1.- In what life form you will be born(Jati), 2.- how long you will live(aayu), 3.- what quality of life you will live(Bhoga).

1. Past life or lives determine whether you will be born as a human being, male or female, or animal forms or plant life (Jati). This effect is unchangeable.

2. Karmas in past life or lives also determine how long you will live(Aayu). Many Yogis state that the life is given in a fixed number of breaths. Therefore if a person has some illnesses, by getting medical help and a careful diet, exercise regime and cultivating mental peace, one can extend his life span. Yogis also use breath control (Pranayama) to increase healthy life span.

3. Many ups and downs in our life, happiness or sufferings also occur because of a mixed results of actions in this life and in previous lives. So with effort, good company of learned persons and by developing mental equanimity, one can handle the ups and downs of life better.

Q. If we have free will, why do we perform some Karma which is harmful to us and we feel very helpless and out of control while doing it?

When a person is born, he has a basic inherent nature which is due to his Karmas in previous lives. We notice that some children have angry temperament while others are calm and peaceful, some are good in Math and Sciences while others detest these subjects. Some kids love to read and others like sports etc.

The second major influence is the environment and the value systems in the house where one is born. We all know that parents encourage and also discourage various activities in the house.

The third factor is destiny formed due to different Karmas performed in the present and previous lives. Now let me illustrate this with an example;

Let us say that a child shows great aptitude in sports in general and tennis in particular. Now let us assume that the parents or siblings are very supportive and provide him with appropriate equipment, lessons and coaching. And due to good Karmas in life, he has good health and right mental attitude; he has the potential to be a very successful tennis player. Now let us say that he is born in a family where learning is revered and sports are de- emphasized, his final outcome will depend upon the resultant of various pulls and pushes that he encounters. Thus the readers will agree that each situation is unique and life is

interplay of many mental and external influences.

That is why people will do certain things even though they may not want to do them and feel very helpless about it. Narayan Swami (a yogi) states that most people go through life in a state of semi-consciousness and mostly live a life of reacting to different circumstances. Only an enlightened person asks the basic questions of life e.g., who am I? What is the purpose of life? How to live a Divine Life? Etc.

There are three stages in any Karma.

When a person performs Karma, this is the first stage and is called Kriyaman (Active).

When a person has finished Karma, this is the second stage and is called Sanchit (Stored or accumulated).

When you start getting result of that Karma, whether good or bad, it is referred to as Prarabhada (Destiny).

Thus the destiny is nothing more than the result of Karma or effort that you have performed either in this life or in the past lives. That is why there is a verse in Atharva Veda that says that the Karma is in my right hand and destiny is in my left hand. In other words, since my Karmas are under my free will, I can also influence and control my destiny or luck.

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Reincarnation

In this world, we hear about two kinds of births. One is being born as human being and second is being born as an animal, bird, insect or tree etc. Human beings are of three kinds, to be a Yogi or a scholarly person or ordinary person. If you have performed more good deeds than sins, you will belong to the first two and if your sins and good deeds are even, you will live an average life. If your past life was mostly sinful, you will be born in subhuman life forms to suffer. Because of these differences, people enjoy the rewards or punishments according to their Karmas. (Yajur Veda Chapter 19 verse 47.)

Reincarnation is a very ancient belief in many religions and societies. All ancient Indian and Buddhist scriptures believe in this concept.

Q. What do you mean by Reincarnation?

A.- Reincarnation means that after the death of an individual, his Soul and Astral body is born again as a living being depending upon their Karmas in the past life or lives. The Soul may be born as a human being, in a wealthy or poor family or any thing in between, male or female, animal forms, insects, plant life etc.

If a person has equal amounts of good and bad Karmas, he is born as a human being. If a person has lot more good Karmas compared to bad, he may be born in good family, enjoying good health and intellect. If a person leads a mostly sinful life, he is born in sub human forms. During human life, one has free will and one gets good and bad results depending upon their Karmas. The subhuman forms are strictly for punishments and the living being pays for and suffers the effects of his bad deeds. Once he has paid his Karmic debt, he will again be born as a human being.

Q. If we have been born and died again and again, how come we don't remember about any of our past lives?

A. The fact that we can not remember about our past lives is not a sufficient reason to disprove reincarnation. The seat of our memories resides in Astral Body in a Part called Mana. This word Mana has been loosely translated as mind, but it is totally distinct and separate from brain. Its power of memory is limited. Even in our own lives, except for broad outlines, we forget the details all the time. Just because I cannot remember about my childhood, it does not mean there was no childhood.

The Soul has two eternal qualities of capacity for knowledge and action. But the faculty of memory is constantly changing. When we are in closer contact with individuals or events, we have strong memory of them. If we happen to move away from persons or places, our memory weakens. The death is a great separator and we forget. Therefore the lack of memory of the past life or lives by most people does not negate the existence of reincarnation.

And it is a good thing too that we don't remember our past lives; otherwise we will have no joy or peace. We would suffer great mental anguish brought on by brooding over the terrible sufferings and sorrows of the past lives.

Q. How can the punishment that God inflicts on the soul reform it when it does not remember its past life nor the reason why it is being punished? How will the punishment prevent the soul from committing further sins?

A. We can acquire knowledge about anything by direct cognition, through inference and by reading the testimony of an expert in that field of knowledge.

We can infer the existence of the previous life of the soul from seeing different people born and brought up under different conditions in this world such as affluence and poverty, happiness and misery, intelligence or lack thereof.

Suppose a physician and a layman both become ill. The physician at once finds out the cause of the illness while the layman cannot because of the difference in their knowledge. But even the layman realizes that he must have violated some laws of diet or sanitation to bring on the disease.

Therefore we can infer the idea of reincarnation by observing people afflicted with pain and sorrow, or endowed with pleasures or joys of this world in unequal proportions. Every cause has an effect and vice versa. We believe God to be absolutely just. Then how can we explain so much inequality in physical, mental and spiritual accomplishments between individuals?

There are obviously great differences of happiness and sufferings amongst people in this world. Then what is the cause? The cause is our good or bad Karmas that we have performed in this and previous lives. And if you do not believe in reincarnation and believe that there is only one life, how can we explain a child born during a famine who dies a horrible death due to starvation or the birth of deformed and very ill children? If they are innocent, why are they suffering? What have they done wrong? If there is only one life, the only conclusion is that God is definitely unjust and his system of reward and punishment becomes worse than many ordinary governments and judges.

Direct evidence of Reincarnation is available to advanced Yogis

The Vedas and the Yoga Shastra by Patanjali clearly state that during fifth stage of meditation (Pratyahar) when yogi is able to quiet his Mana in the Astral Body, he can indeed remember his previous lives and he realizes the cause and effect relationship between his Karmas and the qualities of his lives and he can predict his future live

The testimony of an expert

The Vedas, Bhagvad Geeta state clearly that souls go through cycles of life and death. Only the body dies and soul enveloped in astral body goes on to next life.

The mystic Edward Casey also said there is reincarnation after death.

Q. Every body has similar misery or happiness. For example, four servants are carrying the rich merchant to the court of law. Their (servants) burden is heavy but with each step, they feel better. On the other hand, the rich merchant's worries increase because he is not sure whether he is going to win the case or not. At the court, the servants can relax whereas the rich man has mental stress.

A. This is not correct. Because if the rich man and the servant were given an opportunity to exchange their positions, the rich man will refuse while the latter will jump at the chance. Had they been equally happy or miserable, they would have agreed to exchange positions.

A soul comes into the womb of a queen of a learned and righteous king whilst another in the womb of a poor woman. One is happy and well cared for from the day of conception while the other suffers in many ways. In the queen's home, the

child is properly fed and cared for. He is well loved and happy. In the second case, the child suffers pangs of hunger, inadequate care etc.

The infliction of suffering or rewarding of happiness to the souls without their having done bad or good Karmas in previous lives to deserve it, would disgrace the Divine Justice. Besides, if we suffer or enjoy in this world without any rhyme or reason, what is the need to be virtuous? In the absence of laws of Karma, everything depends on God's whims. He may punish some or reward others whether they deserve it or not.

There is a beautiful question and answer verse in the Vedas, which goes like this:

Q. (from the Soul)- I greatly adore your loving face when you give me pleasures and happiness but I greatly fear your punishing face when you inflict sufferings upon me.

A. (from God to the soul)- We are two conscious entities, and we are friends for eternity. Why should a friend be afraid of another? Please look inside your heart. If you have not done anything immoral or unethical, you have nothing to fear from me. But if you have done bad Karmas, you cannot escape my justice. My face is the same. It changes for you depending upon your perspective. My justice is the same for all the souls.

Q. What other proof do you have about reincarnation?

A. 1. Finding of exceptional intelligence in children:

Pascal when he was only twelve years old knew plain geometry and calculus without ever having studied it before.

There is a lady named Shakuntala, who is able to add and subtract very large numbers instantly and is called human computer.

Mozart was a great pianist at age four and started composing when he was only eight.

2. There are many well documented cases of small children remembering about their past life and its veracity has been confirmed. Let me relate one case that is very intriguing.

In November 1935 this case was published in many newspapers. A girl was born in Delhi, India. When she became old enough to be able to talk, she would talk about her other family in the previous life. The parents thought that the girl had overactive imagination.

One day, she saw a Brahmin and recognized him. The girl said that he used to come to my house to perform religious ceremonies and I used to give him food and money etc. as is customary and he used to live in Mathura (a city 120 miles southwest of Delhi, India). The Brahmin was surprised and he agreed that he used to live in Mathura city and has recently moved to Delhi. The girl gave home address of her husband from the past life in Mathura. Everything that the girl remembered was found to be true.

According to this report, she was married in a house in Mathura and had two daughters and a son. After the birth of her son, she developed postpartum infection and died in great physical pain and mental anguish. The news spread. Then her husband from past life, his brother and the young son came from Mathura to Delhi to meet this girl. The girl recognized her husband and her brother-in-law. When she saw the son, she hugged him with great affection and cried for a long time. Then she fed the child and gave her toys to the son (who is little older than her at that time).

In those days in India, there were no reliable banking or safety vaults. Women frequently hid their jewelry in secret places to prevent them from being stolen. The family in Mathura had

not been able to find her jewelry since her death. She went to Mathura and was able to tell them where the jewelry had been hidden. After some years, her past life memories faded. Relatives will remind her of the extraordinary events of her childhood but she lost interest.

The following conditions must be present before such cases can be properly investigated.

1. The person must be born as a human being immediately after death because only a human being can describe the memories and there are living witnesses who can confirm or refute the story.

2. There is also need for some reminders to jog the memory of the child. It could happen when a child meets some acquaintance from previous life or happens to visit the place where he was born or may see the place on television.

3. There is small issue of parental attitude. In western countries, a child is likely to be labeled as having overactive imagination or receive psychotherapy treatment.

4. Scholars who have studied the subject thoroughly like Ian Stevenson of University of Virginia and who wrote a book on the subject (Twenty cases of reincarnations) and a verse in Mahabharata also states that most children with memories of previous lives have usually died a painful or accidental or violent death.

Of all the discussions of God, souls, Karma etc. the reincarnation is the only provable proposition. If we are convinced that there is reincarnation, then everything falls in place and ordinary people can understand Vedic Philosophy.

The only other way is by inference because direct knowledge is only possible for the advanced Yogis. And that knowledge is subjective. But it is open to anybody who chooses to follow the Divine Path.

Let me close with few verses from ancient Hindu scriptures.

1. **Lord Krishna said,**" I taught this Karma Yoga in the past to Vaivaswan who taught this to Manu who then taught it to his son Ikshvaku. It has been preserved by that tradition. For a while, the knowledge was lost. Today, I am teaching it to you once again."

   Price Arjuna asked," You have been born in later times. Vaivaswan (a famous historical figure) was born long time ago. How could you have taught this knowledge to him?" .

   Lord Krishna who is a Self Realized soul replied," You and I have been born countless number of times. I know my past lives but you do not know them."

   (Bhagvad Geeta Chapter 4 verses 1 to 5)

2. When a person has true knowledge, then he realizes," I have been born many times and have died countless times. In this cycle of life and death, I grew in thousands of wombs. I ate many different meals, drank from the breasts of several mothers and saw countless parents and loved ones. I have had many painful births and deaths. The only way I will get out of this ocean of suffering is to love God and live my life according to his precepts."

   (Sage Yaskyacharya, author of Nirukta)

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Yoga

This mind is very restless. Whether I am awake or sleeping, it gives me no peace. When I am awake, it is always thinking, sometimes regretting about the past, sometimes worrying about the future. When I go to sleep, even though I appear inactive, it keeps on churning in the dream world. Compared to its speed, the speed of light is negligible.

All our senses bring knowledge from outside to the mind. It is the principal seat of our memories of past lives and present life. This is very powerful force within me. Since I have become aware of its incredible qualities, I pray to you O Lord, let there be no bad or harmful thoughts in my mind. Please grant me this strength that only loving, nonviolent, truthful and noble thoughts permeate my mind.

(Yajur Veda Chapter 34 Verse 1 interpreted by Abhay Dev.)

This mind as an important part of Astral Body is immortal and accompanies the soul life after life. By stilling their mind, Yogis can bring it under their control. Then the Yogi can know about the past lives and future births. With your grace O Lord, let there always be only noble thoughts in my mind. (Yajur Veda Chapter 34 Verse 4.)

Yoga is derived from Sanskrit root word Yuj, which means to unite. Yoga is the spiritual science, which unites an individual Soul with God. Yoga is extensively discussed in all four Vedas, Upanishadas, and Yoga Shastra by Sage Patanjali and in Bhagwad Geeta. Many other Yogis have written about their personal experiences in various books. In this book, I will base my writings mainly on the Yoga Shastra by Sage Patanjali because it is the most authentic and revered book by all Yogis. To be sure, Sage Patanjali states in the beginning of the book that Yoga has been originally described in the Vedas and he is merely writing it as an instruction treatise for the Yogis.

Yoga Shastra is divided in to four main parts,

1. Samadhi pad
2. Sadhana Pad
3. Vibhuti Pad
4. Kaivalaya Pad.

This is not simply a book for intellectual discussions but it is really a step-by-step practical manual to practice and achieve higher stages of Yogic experience and knowledge. You could spend a lifetime and still not completely comprehend the subtle nuances of various stages described. In the final analysis, it is a subjective experience and it has been repeatedly affirmed by Yogis of highest integrity. This is a brief description of various chapters in the book of Yoga by Patanjali.

Samadhi Pad.

This chapter describes the universally accepted definition of Yoga and advises people who are very interested or advanced in the spiritual science of Yoga. Let me give an English translation of some of the verses.

1. Yoga is the spiritual science of totally silencing all the thoughts in the mind (a part of the Astral Body). There are five divisions of human beings based on the state of restlessness of their mind.

   A. **kshipta**- People who are trying to calm their mind but don't seem to succeed. Majority of us belong to this group.

   B. **Moodha**- People who are in deep ignorance and materialistic and have no interest in any spiritual subjects.

   C. **Vikshipta**- People who are beginners in the science of Yoga and occasionally their mind calms down but mostly it is still restless.

   D. **Aikagrta (State of one pointed concentration)**- This is a higher state of Yoga. The Yogi is able to focus his mind on one subject at a time without any intrusion from any other thoughts for varying length of time.

   The ability to focus your mind or concentrate your mind is an acquired achievement but we also know of accomplished people in different fields of activities who have this ability in different degrees from birth. Great scientists like Einstein had well known capacity for focusing his mind on the problem at hand. Even in a classroom, the difference between high achievers in studies or sports is

dependent upon their differing ability to concentrate on the subject or sport they happen to be engaged in.

E. **Niruddh**- This is the highest stage of Yoga when a Yogi is able to silence and transcend all thoughts in the mind. At this stage, Yogi becomes unaware of his own body, mind and his own existence and experiences a state of absolute bliss and becomes suffused with indescribable joy. (chapter 1. Verse 2.)

2. When the Yogi transcends the restlessness of mind completely (Niruddh), he achieves Self Realization.(chapter 1 Verse 3.)
3. When your mind is not silent, your mental status can be calm, restless or full of confusion and ignorance depending upon your thought processes and it is constantly changing.(chapter 1 Verse 4)
4. By constant practice of teachings of Yoga (Abhyasa) and being detached from worldly pleasures (Vairagya) helps you concentrate your mind and finally silence and transcend it.(chapter 1 verse 12).

   In Bhagwad Geeta, Prince Arjuna asks Lord Krishna that you keep talking about controlling the restlessness of mind but to me it appears to be as difficult as controlling the constantly changing currents of wind.

   Lord Krishna replied to him that there is no question that mind is very powerful and very hard to control but he reassures him that by constant practice and detachment, it can be focused and silenced.(Bhagwad Geeta chapter 6 verses 35-36).
5. Yogi must practice meditation for long time, regularly, with great reverence and enthusiasm to achieve success.(chapter 1 verse 14).
6. Yogi must become detached to known, imagined and heard pleasures in life to help him calm and ultimately silence the mind.(chapter 1verse 15).

7. Even from childhood, some Yogis show great facility and success in yoga. They have brought this knowledge from their previous lives.(chapter1 verse 16).

   In Bhagwad Geeta, Prince Arjuna asks Lord Krishna that supposing an individual tries to meditate and practice Yoga but due to inability to control his senses and mind, he slides back; what happens to such an aspirant? Does he break apart like a rain cloud, full of promise that brings no rain? Please answer this question for me because I don't know of any other person who could possibly know the answer.(Bhagwad Geeta chapter 6 verses 37-38-39)

   Lord Krishna replied that any body who meditates and travels on the path of Yoga, whether successful or not, never comes to any harm. If he has inner desire to practice Yoga, he will be born into the home of spiritual and ethical people where the environment is conducive to learning Yoga. Depending upon his burning desire to learn Yoga, he may be born into the family of Yogis. In the world, this is the most desirable and fortunate birth. There he gets his old achievements in the path of Yoga from his previous lives, progresses rapidly and in many more lives, constantly improving, achieves Self Realization and direct communion with God. (Bhagwad Geeta chapter 6 verses 40 to 45).

8. God is untouched by ignorance, desires, Karmas and their results for eternity.(chapter 1 verse24).

9. He is the ultimate possessor of all knowledge. There is none equal or greater than Him.(chapter1 verse25).

10. He is the ultimate Teacher (Guru) of all other teachers (Gurus) because He and His knowledge are beyond the limits of time. But other teachers have always limited knowledge compared to God. Our worldly teachers are born ignorant, learn knowledge by being taught, and lose their knowledge in the state of sleep and secondary to physical and mental illnesses and completely after death. (Chapter 1 verse 26).

11. His name is Om. He has been called father, teacher, creator etc., but His name is Om (also written as Aum). Yogis recite and concentrate upon the word Om during Jap Yoga or Mantra Yoga to calm, focus and silence the mind (chapter 1 verse 27).

12. Yogi should recite and meditate upon this sacred word Om.(chapter 2 verse 28).

13. In higher stages of Yoga, a special discriminating intellect appears called Ritambhara Prajya. This intellect reveals deeper secrets of knowledge in any field.(Chapter 1 verse 48).

14. The impressions or imprints that are produced during this stage of Yoga wash away all the imprints accumulated in our Astral Body. Thus the cause that initiates cycles of life and death is rendered ineffective.(chapter 1 verse 50).

15. Finally Yogi sheds his Astral Body, and achieves the highest stage of Yoga called Samadhi (deepest trance). Thus he is Self realized soul, directly experiences God, is freed from the cycles of life and death and sufferings and acquires the state of Emancipation (also called Nirvana, Moksha, Kaivalya).

Sadhana Pad

The second chapter describes the steps and techniques to advance in Yoga for ordinary individuals like most of us. Let us read on.

1. Tap, Swadhayaya and Ishwar Pranidhan are three steps of Kriya Yoga.

2. A. Tap means to cultivate tolerance and acceptance towards life's ups and downs, heat or cold, gains or losses and not let your mind get too disturbed or restless. It also means to lead a busy, regular life in the service of your fellow human beings and not get perturbed if there are obstacles and failures in life nor get too excited about worldly praise, name and fame. Keep your mind focused on transitory nature of worldly accolades and praises or sufferings.

B. Swadhayaya means study of self and studying of spiritual literature, meditate upon it and bring it into practice. Yogi constantly keeps a close watch on his thoughts, speech and actions and makes sure that they do not violate the ethical principles taught in the scriptures. The aspirant also should seek the company of spiritually inclined people (Satsang).

C. Ishwar Pranidhan- Yogis are advised to monitor their thoughts, speech and actions and see if they are worthy of being presented to God as homage. Before doing anything, they ask themselves or read the scriptures to find out what God will advise them to do in this situation and follow the inner divine counsel.(chapter 2 verse 1).

3. Lack of true knowledge, attachment, jealousy and fear of death are major mental defects that cause the mind to be restless and unfit to practice Yoga.(chapter 2 verse3).

4. Lack of true knowledge (Avidhya) consists of

   a. Believing what is impermanent to be permanent. Anything that has been born must die one day is true knowledge and reverse is Avidhya.

   b. To consider that which is impure to be pure.

   c. Worldly pleasures that often end with sufferings; to see happiness in them is Avidhya.

   d. To consider body, senses and brain etc. to be the seat of consciousness rather than the soul is grand ignorance (Avidhya).(chapter 2 verse5).

5. Inability to distinguish between the Soul and the intellect that resides in Astral body results from deep ignorance which is called Asmita. Only a Yogi in highest stage of Yoga can know this distinction.(chapter2 verse6).

6. If we have derived pleasure from some person, place or thing, the residual memory of that pleasure is called Raga. This memory later on incites us to seek and repeat that experience.(chapter2 verse 7).

7. If we have suffered from any agency, the residual memories of pain, hate, fear and anger is called Dwesha. This tendency leads us to making protective groups, raise armies etc., to forestall any future repeat of suffering from that quarter.(chapter2verse8).

8. The fear of death (Abhinivesha). This fear of death is present in all living beings, intelligent person as well as an uneducated one. And the fear permeates naturally in our being, because all of us desperately want to continue to exist.

   Now a human being can by direct observation and inference, come to the conclusion that death is painful and then he fears it. But how does even a small insect, which has not experienced death yet, still runs to escape death? It is not enough to say that this is naturally inherent in the insect to run from death. Wherever there is consciousness, there is desire but that desire comes after knowledge. When we understand that something will give us pleasure, we actively seek it and vice versa. Therefore the knowledge has to come beforehand and decide for us whether it is pleasurable or painful and then we either seek it or avoid it.

   Now the knowledge is of two kinds, either we have experienced it in this lifetime or in our past lives. Now this tiny insect who fears death and is running away from it; how did it receive this knowledge of death that it is trying to run away from? It did not get this knowledge in this lifetime because it is not waiting to find out. Therefore, this insect has experienced death many times before in countless lives and has a very deep imprint of fear of death and always tries to run away from death. This fear of death is an indirect proof of reincarnations of souls.(chapter2verse9)

9. Under the influence of these desires, anger, greed, attachment etc., we do good and bad Karmas and continue in the cycle of life and death.(chapter2verse12).

10. Our good and bad Karmas decide which life form we will be

born into (Jati), how long we will live (Aaayu) and what quality of life we will lead (Bhoga). The life form that we are born into is immutable. But by good actions we can extend our life span and modify our quality of life. (Chapter2verse13).

11. Good Karmas bring us happiness and bad Karmas lead to pain and suffering.(chapter2verse14). Since all of us like pleasures, should we do good Karmas to increase our happiness? The answer follows:

12. What the ordinary people see as pleasures are in reality sensory indulgences. And these pleasures are contaminated with inherent sufferings, which is why a Yogi does not seek worldly pleasures. Let us examine the hidden suffering present in the sensual pleasures.

    a. Temporal suffering- when we enjoy sensual pleasures, we never get permanent satisfaction or peace. The desire to repeat those pleasures becomes stronger and stronger. As time goes on, either the pleasures elude us or our capacity to engage in them or enjoy them gets weaker due to old age or infirmities. The desire is still young but time has passed us by. Therefore we are full of regrets that we can no longer indulge in our pleasures and we suffer mental anguish.

    b. Those things that we enjoy, often there are many obstacles in acquiring them. We feel anger, hate, dislike against those people who we perceive as our competitors or enemies. Even when we are experiencing pleasures, this fear still remains, "I hope these pleasures don't leave me". This is the second hidden suffering in sensual pleasures.

    c. When we have pleasurable experience, it leaves an imprint and motivates us to repeat that experience. In order to achieve our goal, we do good and bad Karmas and get deeper into cycle of life and death. And that is full of sufferings.

An ordinary individual actively seeks pleasures and does not pay heed to future sufferings that are yet to come. Whereas a Yogi is able to discern future sufferings inherent in worldly

pleasures and he turns his back on them. Sage Vyasa says that if a fiber touches your skin, you may not notice it but if it falls in your eye it is very hard to miss it. Advanced Yogi becomes as sensitive as cornea of your eye and when worldly pleasures entice him, he is able to discern future sufferings inherent in them and he is able to walk away from them. (chapter2 verse15).

13. We should make an effort to prevent future sufferings. The past is gone. Let us start now to influence our future.(chapter2verse16).

14. The root cause of suffering is Avidhya (ignorance). The ignorance occurs because the conscious entity soul is so deeply enmeshed with the Astral Body and gross body that the soul mistakenly identifies with the sufferings of the body and mind. In reality, the soul is conscious, alert, aware, eternal (Chetan) entity and Astral body and gross body are made up of primordial particles, which are nonliving, inert, and unconscious (Jarh). Only in highest stages of Yoga, can this misunderstanding be corrected.(chapter2verse17).

15. The true knowledge is the cure for the ignorance.(chapter2verse26).

16. By following eight steps of Yoga, one can obtain true knowledge.(chapter2verse28)

Eight steps of Yoga

17. Those eight steps of Yoga are; Yamas, Niyamas, Aasanas, Pranayam, Pratyahar, Dharana, Dhyan and amadhi.Chapter2verse29).

First step- Five Yamas.

18. Ahinsa (non violence), Satya (Truth), Asteya (non stealing), Brahmcharya (control of senses) and Aparigraha (non hoarding) are five Yamas.

    a. **Ahinsa**- means to be non violent towards all living beings in thought, speech and actions. It obviously means never to eat meat. And the positive side of this is universal love.

b. **Satya** (truth)- Always speak the truth to the best of your knowledge.

c. **Asteya** (non stealing) If something does not belong to you, do not desire it, take it or steal it.

d. **Brahmcharya**- Control your senses, and except for your wife, look towards other women(depending on their age) as your mother, sister or daughter.

e. **Aparigraha**-In your life, take what you need for your basic needs but do not hoard wealth, food etc., because you will be depriving others of basic needs.

Ahinsa (non violence) is the most important Yama. Others complement and improve upon nonviolence. For example, if I tell a lie, steal, hoard resources, I will be committing violence (chapter2verse30)

Second Step- Five Niyamas.

19. a. **Shouch** (outer cleanliness with soap and water and inner cleanliness with truth),

b. **Santosh** (being contented in whatever you have earned with honest means),

c. **Tap** (hard work, diligence and perseverence in following your goal),

d.**Swadhayaya** (reflecting upon your actions and study of spiritual works and company of like minded aspirants)

e. **Ishwar Pranidhan** (doing all your actions in a way that they are worthy of presenting to God as homage).

(Chapter2 verse 32)

How can we tell if a Yogi has mastered Yamas and Niyamas, the true foundation of Yoga?

20. When a person truly becomes nonviolent, the people who come in contact with him tend to give up hatred and are strongly influenced by him.(chapter2 verse35).

21. When a person becomes truthful in thought, speech and action, his speech is very impressive and influential. Whenever he says something, it comes to pass and he can foretell future.(chapter2verse36)

22. When a person does not desire, take or steal anything, he never lacks anything in his life. In other words all his needs get taken care of. How? A truthful and honest person is respected in all walks of life. His needs, which are simple to begin with, are not hard to satisfy.(chapter2verse37).

23. When a person has control over his senses and desires, he becomes physically and mentally very strong. He can focus at the job at hand and is not easily distracted.(chapter2verse38).

24. When a Yogi stops all hoarding of money, resources, attachments etc., the memory of his past lives comes to him. By focusing on the cause and effect relation of Karmas and their results, he can easily predict what his next births would be.(chapter2verse39).

25. When he cleans his body with soap and water and finds that it gets dirty again and again and he realizes that everyone's body is similar, he loses attachment with his own body and becomes uninterested in physical contact with other people.(chapter2verse40).

26. When he purifies his thoughts, speech and actions through truth, meditation, service and the company of other Yogis, he purifies his Astral body, learns the ability to concentrate his mind and progress towards the path of Yoga.(chapter2verse41).

27. When a person is content with what he has earned through honest and lawful means, he acquires a sense of peace and plenty that the covetous poor or rich people can only dream about.(chapter2verse42).

28. When a person persists in the path of Yoga and is undeterred by life's ups and downs, heat or cold, praise or criticisms, he acquires great physical and mental capacities.(chapter2verse43).

29. When a person reflects upon his daily actions and repeats good Karma and stops bad Karmas in life, and studies spiritual books and follows their teachings in day to-day life, he achieves great success in his spiritual path.(chapter2verse44).

30. If a Yogi performs all his actions with this belief in mind that God is present everywhere and He sees all and knows all and you cannot escape His Divine Justice, he does all his Karmas as an obedient and loyal servant of God according to His Teachings in the spiritual literature, he achieves Samadhi (highest stage of Yoga) very rapidly through the grace of God (chapter2verse45).

The third step of Yoga- Aasana.

31. The third step of Yoga is Aasana (posture). Sage Patanjali says that a desirable posture is one in which you can sit for a long time with calmness and stability. There are many centers that teach Yoga and emphasize posture and stretching exercises. I hope that it is clear to my readers that this is only one of the eight steps of Yoga.

    The basic foundation of Yoga is strict adherence to Yamas and Niyamas. The road to concentrating and silencing the restless mind is to lead an ethical and moral life. If a person eats meat, smokes and drinks and does not make any effort to improve his moral character, he will find little benefit from Yoga.(chapter2verse46).

    The ideal posture is sitting in a comfortable seat with backbone and neck in a straight line. Initially one gets tired but by practicing one can extend the time one can sit without moving. The mind and body influence each other. If the mind is restless, it is hard to sit still but if you sit down very still, it helps to calm the mind too. According to Narayan Swami, if you can sit without moving for three and half hour, you have mastered the step of Aasana (posture).

32. If you have perfected Aasana, You can handle dualities of life

like heat and cold, thirst or hunger and they do not disturb your practice of Yoga easily.(chapter2verse48).

The fourth step of Yoga- Pranayama.

33. After you have learned Aasana, next limb of Yoga is called Pranayama, it includes control of breathing.(chapter2 verse49)

34. There are three kinds of Pranayama.

    A. External- you breathe out completely and hold. Do not breathe in as long as possible. This is called Rechak Pranayama.

    B. Internal (Poorak)- You take a deep and slow breath in and after completion, hold it as long as you comfortably can.

    C. Kumbhaka Pranayama.- In this type of Pranayama, you stop breathing any where during the expiratory or inspiratory phase of breathing and hold your breath as long as you can.

35. By regular practice under the supervision of a Yogi, one can gradually increase the length of time one can go without breathing.(chapter 2 verse50).

36. The fourth type of Pranayama occurs when you have been diligently practicing for a long time. In this Pranayama, the Yogi can stop breathing any time at will for a long period of time. This level of Pranayama transcends the other three Pranayama described above.(chapter 2 verse 51).

How can a Yogi tell when he has mastered Pranayama.

37. When you are an advanced student of Pranayama, the curtain of ignorance over your mind and intellect (Astral Body) gets destroyed and true discriminating intelligence develops just as when the clouds break apart and the sun starts shining.(chapter2 verse52).

38. And it becomes easier to focus and concentrate your mind and one starts advancing in Yoga at a faster pace.(chapter 2 verse53)

The fifth stage of Yoga- Pratyahar.

39. The fifth stage of Yoga is called Pratyahar. In this stage, Yogi becomes capable of one pointed attention. He is able to visualize his Astral Body.(chapter 2 verse 54).

40. Once Pratyahar is achieved, Yogi develops total control over all his senses and it is the other way around for most of us.(chapter 2verse55).

    Narayan Swami in his book, Secrets of Yoga states that Pratyahar becomes achievable when you can hold your breath for more than ten minutes. Thus Pranayama is very helpful. This is also the stage in which Yogi becomes aware of the memories of his past lives.

Vibhuti Pad

The sixth step of Yoga-Dharna.

1. The sixth stage of Yoga is called Dharana. In this stage, Yogi can focus on one thought without interruption from any other thought or thoughts. According to Narayan Swami, If you can hold your breath for about twenty minutes, it is very helpful in mastering this stage.(chapter 3 verse 1).

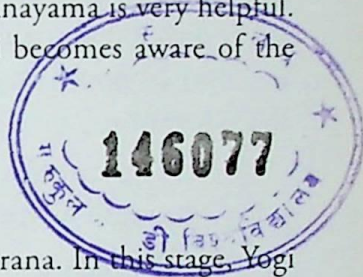
The seventh step of Yoga- Dhayan.

2. The next stage is called Dhayan. As you get better and better in focusing your mind without getting disturbed by any thought, you have conquered the seventh stage of Yoga.(chapter 3 verse 2). Narayan Swami states that if you can hold your breath for over forty minutes, it will help you achieve this stage.

The eighth step of Yoga-Samadhi.

3. The highest stage is called Samadhi.

   During Dharana (sixth stage), the Yogi is aware of himself, and as to what he is focusing on .

   In Dhayan (seventh stage), his concentration is much deeper

and he can hold his focus longer without any intrusion from any other thoughts.

In Samadhi, the Yogi is so much focused on the object of his meditation that he becomes totally unaware of himself. Narayan Swami states that if you can hold your breath for over ninety minutes, it will help you reach this highest state of Samadhi. In this stage, Yogi can know any field of knowledge that he focuses on and achieves Self Realization and direct knowledge of God.

In the third chapter of Yoga Shastra (Vibhuti Pad), Sage Patanjali describes incredible physical, mental and spiritual powers that an advanced Yogi can acquire. I will mention few of these powers.

1. Yogi can live without eating or drinking water for two months while in deep meditation.
2. Yogi can acquire enormous amount of knowledge due to his ability to concentrate
3. Yogi can live without breathing for long periods of time.
4. Yogi can move his soul and astral body as if on a tether, travel far and wide and learn all sorts of things.
5. Yogi can die at will.
6. Yogi can know his past lives and predict his future lives.
7. Yogi can heal physically, mentally and spiritually.
8. The most important achievement that a true Yogi desires is Self Realization and communion with God.

Many beginners in Yoga get enchanted with these powers and start to show off their impressive achievements. Many of them start seeking name and fame. Eventually they back slide and lose their way.

Sage Patanjali warns all aspirants that they should never use their special powers except to serve humanity without desiring

fame or recognition and to meditate upon God.

The Yoga Shastra by Sage Patanjali requires a separate book but I have given a brief outline. This type of Yoga is called Raj Yoga (the Royal Yoga). Over the years, other modifications have been made and I will mention them.

Hath Yoga

The word Hath means being stubborn or persistent. This is one of the schools of Yoga. It elaborates on the third and fourth steps of Yoga called Aasana and Pranayama. Hath Yogis developed many of the stretching exercises and postures. They developed more variations on control of breathing also. Many Hath Yogis have several routines about total body cleansing of nasal passages, stomach and intestines with a thin long piece of cloth and fasting etc.

There are some misguided and ignorant Hath Yogis who stand on one leg in the sun, next to fire in hot day sun etc. This is sheer foolishness and has no relationship with Yogic practices. True Yogis eat very sparingly, keep their body healthy and reduce their personal needs to a minimum. Many famous Yogis like Dayananda and Narayan Swami have rejected some of the extreme and mistaken practices of body cleansings and enemas etc. In Bhagvad Geeta, Krishna has recommended to lead a balanced life of proper eating, rest, meditation and service.

Mantra Yoga

Here a Yogi recites a Mantra, which helps calm the restless mind and later helps in concentration. Many unscrupulous or ignorant people pretend to give secret mantra to the aspirants and charge some money for it too.

In Vedic literature, only two Mantras are recommended and they are neither secret nor a Yogi ever asks or accepts money for it. One is repetition of word Om. The other is Gayatri Mantra. A Jap is repetition of this word Om or Gayatri verse with deep concentration.

Laya Yoga

This Yoga teaches about Prana, a special energy in our bodies that binds Soul, Astral Body with the gross body. The Chinese scholars have referred to it as Chi. Prana makes it possible for the body to carry on breathing, digestion, function of heart and blood circulation, and elimination (urination, bowel movement and child birth).

Laya Yogis described ten Chakras where Astral Body connects and controls the gross body. In deep meditation, Yogi visualizes the Chakras and later is able to control this Prana Power and can use it to heal himself and other people as well.

Karma Yoga

I have talked about it in the chapter on Karma. Yogi performs Nishkam Karma, actions that benefit other people without desiring any money, fame and even their gratitude. Karma is performed as a duty. All true Yogis are encouraged to perform Nishkam Karmas. The greatest gift is the gift of education and in the field of education, teaching Yoga is the greatest gift you can give to an aspirant.

In all forms of Yoga, Raj Yoga by Patanjali is the most revered and accepted by most Yogis. But if any school of Yoga does not emphasize strict adherence to five Yamas (Non violence, Truth, Non stealing, Control of senses and Non hoarding) and five Niyamas (Outer and inner cleanliness, Contentment, Disciplined and spiritual life, Study of scripture and company of Yogis, service with devotion to God), it is worthless. If some school does not forbid eating of meat, eggs, stimulants, smoking or drinking alcohol, they are fraudulent and they have nothing to teach you.

In the Fourth chapter, Patanjali answers questions about higher

stages of Yoga and state of Emancipation. I hope to write all this in great detail in future.

There is great misconception in the East and West that you have to give up the world in order to practice Yoga. This is simply not necessary. The foundation of true Yoga is to lead a moral and ethical life and to serve your fellow human beings without regard of monetary gain, name or fame. This Karma Yoga can be practiced anywhere. Even learning an ordinary profession can take many years. In learning Yoga, great perseverance and regular practice is necessary. If your health does not allow you to sit in a posture or if you cannot control your breathing due to respiratory conditions, one should not get disheartened. All of us can follow Yamas and Niyamas because they are universal principles of morality and to the best of my knowledge, do not conflict with any religious beliefs.

Gurus

There is great clamor for Gurus. I believe that ninety nine percent of work has to be done by the aspirants. A good study of Yoga Shastra by Sage Patanjali will give you basic intellectual basis regarding what Yoga is and more importantly what it is not. Most important part in life is to prepare ourselves and there is a great belief in Yogis that if we do our part, God will send us the Guru when we are good and ready.

Anand Swami gives three guiding principles for choosing a Guru for guidance,

1. He should have conquered the habit of anger.
2. He should have control over his tongue and he should not hanker after tasty foods and drinks and should be gentle and truthful in his speech.

These are preliminary guidelines. We meet many people in our life and initially we are very impressed by them. But if we get an opportunity to spend some time with them, many of their shortcomings become very obvious to us and we may get disappointed.

Let us not put any human being on a pedestal. We are all on a spiritual journey and all of us have different strengths and weaknesses. All of us have struggles going in our minds and we are trying to reconcile conflicting desires and emotions. Therefore it helps to have a healthy dose of skepticism in life. There are many Gurus who are themselves ignorant at best and downright thieves, crooks and criminals. But if you happen to meet a true Yogi by the grace of God, you are very lucky person indeed.

In any case, we should follow five Yamas and five Niyamas and try our best to live a moral and ethical life. That is why Sage Patanjali says that God is the ultimate Guru and by following eight steps of Yoga we should try to still and then silence the incessant noise in our mind and inner guidance will come to you from God and you will achieve true knowledge in life.

Some practical steps for practice of Yoga

Diet- It is very important to change your diet. No meat, fish, chicken, eggs are allowed because it is impossible to obtain them without causing great cruelty to innocent creatures who have done you no harm and are only being killed because their meat tastes good to you. There is absolutely no moral, nutritional or health reason to kill God's creatures. Use of spicy foods and stimulants like caffeine and alcohol are prohibited because they make the mind restless. Simple vegetarian meals including milk are the ideal diet for the aspirant. Overeating is

also bad for health and hinders you in meditation by inducing sleepiness.

It is well known in Yogic literature that control of tongue is very important. It is the seat of sense of taste and essential for speaking. In many centers and retreats, the aspirant is taught to eat the food, as a gift of God in moderation and occasional fasting is also helpful. The aspirant should also refrain from talking (Maun) for a period of time every day and we realize how much useless and sometimes hurtful speech we indulge in every day. Control of tongue is necessary. If you cannot control your tongue and it hankers for new and different tastes, it is very hard to control our senses.

Comparison of the states of sleep and stages of Yoga

When we start to fall sleep, the soul withdraws Pranic energy from the body and the threshold of our response to the external stimuli is reduced. In other words, the sound or touch has to be very strong to wake us up. We become oblivious to environmental stimuli to a point. The aspirant in the path of Yoga needs to develop this faculty of concentration so he is not disturbed by the outside noises etc. and focuses on one thought without interference from any other thought.

When we start to dream, the Prana is concentrated in the Astral Body and according to the Prashnopanishada, the dreams are nothing more then the recapitulation of the events of the day, previous weeks or months and even of the past lives in a confusing or clear manner since all the events of our lives are imprinted in the Astral Body. The fifth stage of Yoga is somewhat similar to the dream state where a Yogi can visualize his Astral body.

When we fall into dreamless deep sleep (Sushupti), this can be compared to the higher stages of Yoga when the mind becomes

silent, dreams stop and we enjoy refreshing and rejuvenating rest .The fundamental difference between the sleep and stages of Yoga is that during sleep we are unconscious and unaware whereas during Yoga, we are very focused, aware and in a state of super consciousness.

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History of Religion in India

I am writing this chapter to familiarize my readers with the evolution of religion in India from ancient to modern times. Our parents teach the tenets of our religion to us in earliest years of our life. Naturally we trust and love members of our family. Religious beliefs are given to us when our discriminating abilities are not well developed. Most of us are emotionally attached to those ideas and would not think of questioning them. This chapter is written to inform the reader about the facts, as I know them to the best of my ability. The chapter is not written to hurt anybody's feelings or to disrespect anyone's belief system.

In ancient times, the religion was based on the Vedas. Various tenets of that have been described in detail in this book. To recapitulate, I will mention these points once again briefly to maintain continuity in the story.

1. There was belief in formless, omnipresent, all powerful, conscious entity called God, Who is eternal and His name is Om. He creates, sustains, and dissolves the universe into elementary forms of matter. He also gives all the souls the fruits of their Karmas.

2. The primordial particles are the material cause of the creation. During the dissolution of the universe, the material cause exists in ultra microscopic form called Prakriti (Primordial Particles). When God creates the cosmos, He aggregates these particles in different permutations and combinations to create nonliving things like stars, moons, planets, oceans etc. He also used matter to create Astral Bodies and gross bodies for all the living beings. These particles are unconscious, inert and without any free will and so is everything created out of these particles.

3. There are countless (for us but not for God) eternal Souls, which are conscious, alert, aware, distinct entities. The basic

quality of soul is desire for knowledge and action. They have free will in Karma (action) but having performed a good or bad Karma, they receive happiness or suffering according to Divine Justice. Based on their Karmas, they go through cycles of lives and deaths called Reincarnation. Being conscious, they have the power of decision, discretion and direction in regards to performing their Karmas. When soul becomes Self Realized with practice of Yoga, it becomes emancipated and escapes the cycles of life and death.

4. The society was loosely divided into four divisions of Brahmins, Kshatria, Vaishya and Shudras. They were based on the basis of their education, aptitude and qualifications. A person's life was divided into four stages of life, Brahmcharya, Grihastha, Vanprastha and Sanyasa. For details, please refer to chapter 4 in this book.

India was very prosperous and well governed nation for thousands of years. The Vedas were taught in many schools. All four Vedas are available unchanged from ancient times because Vedic families memorized them till modern times. At one time, there were 1127 different schools, which studied and researched Vedas and extensively wrote about them. These sets of books were called Brahmnas. Only few of these works survive today.

Of the Upvedas, only the Ayurveda survives, the science of health and disease. There are eleven Upanishadas but we know very little about the life of Sages who wrote them. These Sages were writing for the benefit of mankind and were not interested in intellectual property rights or royalties out of their books.

We know the names of the authors of six schools of philosophy but the authors left no record of their autobiography and any information about them has been lost. We do know that Sage Patanjali, the author of Yoga Shastra, also wrote Mahabhashya, the authoritative commentary on the Ashtadhyayi, the book of Vedic

grammar by Sage Panini. Sage Patanjali wrote a book about Ayurveda too, which is not available any more.

Sage Valmiki wrote the epic Ramayana, and Sage Vyasa wrote Mahabharata the great epic about 5200 years ago. Sage Vyasa also wrote very revered and popular Bhagvad Geeta and hundreds of scholars have written commentaries about Geeta. It is a sacred text and guide for Yogi.

Sage Vyasa wrote an authoritative commentary on Yoga Shastra by Patanjali. He is also the author of Uttar Mimansa or Vedanta, the sixth school of philosophy.

The legend has it that in the beginning God gave the knowledge of four Vedas to Sages Agni, Vayu, Aditya and Angira. They in turn taught Brahma all the four Vedas. Brahma also wrote a Samriti, the book of laws which led to the system of governance and running of the society. Many additions were done to the original text, which has been lost. Only the Manu Samriti survives written by Sage Manu and again not much is known about personal life of Manu.

Indian scriptures state that at the junction of Sat Yuga and Treta Yuga, approximately 2.2 million years ago, there was a great flood. The legend has it that an expert in meteorology informed Sage Manu that a great flood was about to happen and Sage Manu advised the community to prepare itself with food, boats etc. These people survived the flood and reestablished civilization on the higher areas of Himalayas, which were above the inundation.

The first king of present India was Ikshvaku who was chosen by the assembly representing the community. The advisers were Brahmins; Kshatrias took care of administration and defense needs of the country. Vaishyas handled business and agriculture and paid taxes and supported the society. The Shudras were involved in labor and service jobs. As I have written in this book, there was never any discrimination or mistreatment of Shudras by other classes of people. By the laws in Manu Samriti, children of all the four classes went to

the same school and received same education and many of them would move on to different class depending upon their qualifications and aptitude, e.g. son of Shudra may join military service and become Kshatria.

From Ikshvaku to the time of King Yudhishtra (about 5200 years ago), India had Vedic civilization. Most of the kings were noble and good administrators. There was a story about a noble king Sagar, whose son committed a murder. The king sent him to a prison term in solitary confinement of ten years, followed by exile from the area. He also revoked his rights of inheriting the throne. There was very famous king Mandhata in Sat Yuga. Ramayana was written about the rule of a noble king Rama in Treta Yuga. Mahabharata period happened at the end of Dwaper Yuga, about 5200 years ago.

The civil war between the Pandavas and Kaurvas 5200 years ago caused great harm to the nation. Many great warriors and Sages died. The kingdom shrunk in size and influence and a long period of decline in civilization was starting. The main causes of decline were:

1. The Brahmins stopped studying and teaching Vedas and other subjects to other three classes of people. When there was general decline in the education level of majority of the citizens, the kings became more interested in luxuries and sexuality and failed to do their duties of proper governance.

2. The Brahmins slowly appropriated lots of power and special privileges unto themselves. They made a declaration that the Brahamin is above the law and king cannot prosecute or punish him.

3. The Brahmins further stated that the family of his birth rather than his education, character and qualifications determines class of a person. In other words, you were deemed to be a Brahmin simply by being born in a Brahmin Family whether you had any education or not,

making it hereditary in nature. The structure of the society became very rigid and inflexible. When they were asked about their authority to make such a declaration, they insisted that it was written in Vedas and in Manu Samriti. Of course it was untrue but the king and citizens were uneducated and true Brahmins who opposed and criticized them were persecuted and exiled from the areas.

4. The next act of degradation came when these corrupt Brahmins further decreed that the Woman and Shudras had no rights of getting an education. This forced a great moral and spiritual decay when half of the nation (women) and Shudras were forcibly kept ignorant. The women became second-class citizens. We have historical examples during Vedic times of Gargi and many women scholars who used to teach yoga in their retreats to aspirants. Women scholars had interpreted many verses of Vedas in Vedic times.

5. The most cruel and inhuman actions by these corrupt Brahmins were the rules that they promulgated about the status and treatment of the Shudras. The Shudras were denied education, forced to remain in profession of their parents forever and worse still, started segregating them; denied them the right of worship and even started the curse of untouchability. These crooked Brahmins further stated that if anybody touched a Shudra, or his shadow fell over the members of other three classes, the Shudra was to be punished severely and member of other three classes will have to take a bath to purify himself.

   This cursed actions relegated the Shudras to a status of lifetime of slavery, abuse, servitude with no hope of release. And after his death, his children suffered the same fate with no avenue of escape from that misery.

6. When the power of Brahmins became supreme, they started many rituals and fasts that the Kshatrias and Vaishyas had to follow. And every time this meant that Brahmins had to be fed and given generous gifts of gold, money, cattle and land. They also started the custom of Shrada, an elaborate and expensive ceremony to be performed after the death of a member of the family. This lasted for twelve days and had to be repeated annually to provide peace to the soul of the dearly departed. They (Brahmins) claimed that by feeding a Brahmin, your dead relative would receive similar food in heaven.

7. When Brahminism became hereditary, they stopped studying Vedas themselves and community was given education only related to their profession. Another major crime committed by these crooks was that they wrote and added Sanskrit verses to many ancient scriptures. Many of these false verses were added to Manu Samriti, the book of laws. Whenever any body questioned any of their actions, rules and rituals, they claimed that it was written in Vedas but they could not show Vedas because they were too sacred even to be seen by any person other than a Brahmin. But they instead showed Manu Samriti to which they had added false verses to justify their corrupt practices, which in reality had absolutely no sanction in Vedas or Manu Samriti.

Let me quote some verses in original Manu Samriti to make my point.

a. The Brahmin becomes Shudra or vice versa depending upon their actions, education and character. Same criteria apply to Kshatria and Vaishyas.

b. At the age of eight, all children should be sent to schools supported by the state called Guru Kula. There should be

different schools for boys and girls. And men will teach in boys' school and women teachers in girls' school.

c. After finishing their education, they will be assigned different classes depending upon their education, aptitude and character.

d. Whenever women are honored and respected in a family, that family enjoys great happiness and prosperity. And if the women are mistreated in a family, that family will be miserable, never do well and ultimately perish.

Manu Samriti available in India contains these verses as well as the false additions wrongfully ascribed to the great Sage Manu. Any impartial reader can see that the same author cannot write one thing in a book and then in another place totally contradict himself.

In my opinion, Sage Manu is blameless and mistreatment of women and Shudras was entirely the fault of a group of corrupt and dishonorable people who were never worthy of being called Brahmins. A little over one hundred years ago, Great scholar and Yogi Dayananda pointed out the additions of false verses in Manu Samriti and very forcefully denounced the practices of determining class by birth, denial of education to women and Shudras and any mistreatment of this group of people.

These Selfish and cruel actions by these corrupt people calling themselves as Brahmins ushered an era that lasted for over 3500 years and destroyed the heart and the soul of this nation. Especially the Shudras were most miserably treated in India for centuries. Over the centuries, many great people like Shankaracharya, Guru Nanak, Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda, Ram Mohan Roy and countless others tried to improve their lot and had different degree of success. Swami Dayananda and Arya Samaj did a yeoman's work to educate and reverse discrimination against Shudras and bring them in

the main stream. Many of them converted into Islam during the Mughal Empire in India while the missionaries converted others to Christianity during the British colonization of India.

Mahatma Gandhi devoted most of his freedom struggle in educating and persuading his fellow countrymen to change their mistaken fossilized beliefs about mistreatment of this major segment of the population. It was mainly because of his tireless efforts that this aggrieved minority was given constitutional protections and guarantees to improve their lot. Thankfully, great progress has been made but lot of work still remains to be done.

Vam Marga

About 3000 years ago, a sect appeared among these corrupt group of Brahmins called Vam Marga.(literally- beautiful path). They managed to convince many reigning kings who were powerful but were bereft of any character or good education. They wrote many books called Tantras in which various statements were written with the word Shiva Uchav (Shiva said), Parvati Uchav, Bhairava Uchav etc. Let us see what is written in these stupid Tantra Books.

1. **Kali Tantra-** Alcoholic drinks (Madhya), meat (mans), fish (meen), cakes (mudra) and sexual relations (maithun), all of these five beginning with the word M (Makars) lead to salvation in all ages.

2. **Kularnava Tantra-** While in the circle of Bhairavas (devotees of this cult), persons of all classes are equal but after leaving the Bhairavi circle, they revert back to their class.

3. **Mahanirman Tantra-** He who drinks and drinks and drinks alcohol till he falls to the floor, gets up and starts drinking again, he will be released from the bondage of reincarnation

4. **Gyan Sankalani Tantra**- Excepting his mother let a man have sexual relation with any woman. The Vedas and the Shastras and other ancient books are like prostitutes.

Claiming all men to be the incarnation of Shiva and all women to be incarnation of Parvati, they mutter this phrase, " I am Shiva and you are Parvati and we should have sex together". They also met in certain temples and had great orgies of eating meat, drinking wine or alcohol and group sex. The priests amongst these Vam Margi also started animal sacrifice during the Vedic Fire Ceremonies (Havan) claiming that it ceases to be a violent act because it is being done to propitiate the God. They also wrote that by this sacrifice, the animal now and the host of the ceremony in future would go to heaven to eternal pleasures. It will be obvious that this is a cult disguised as a religion.

All over the world for all times, Vedas say that there are two paths, the path towards God and the path towards the material pleasures for sex, money and fame. Most of the people follow the latter path while only few want to know God. Vam Margis had many converts to their cause. They punished, banished and persecuted true Brahmins who spoke out against them.

Start of Jain religion

There was a king named Rishabh Dev, who ruled in Gorakhpur in North India. He was a devotee of Vam Margis. There was this practice of sending a decorated horse and the military followed the horse wherever it went. If there was no challenge, the area covered by the horse was said to belong to the king. If there was opposition by a neighboring king, a war will ensue and after a certain period, the king would bring other weak feudal lords under his control and collect taxes from them. After that, there was a celebration before the coronation of the king where his beloved queen was required to have sexual

intercourse with that horse as decreed by the Vam Margi Priest. During that act, the horse ended up kicking the queen in the head and she died of apparent brain injuries. The king Rishabh Dev was heart broken and he started to reflect upon the practices of Vam Marga. He renounced his kingdom to his son, became a mendicant and began to expose corrupt practices of the Vam Margis.

He had remarkable success because many people hated Vam Margis and their abuse of power. The Vam Marga lost its power and went underground. It existed in secret cults and societies and survives to this day in India and abroad. My readers may have heard the name of Acharya Rajneesh who opened a center in the state of Oregon, U.S.A., and had 95 Rolls Royce at his disposal and millions of dollars contributed by his devotees. There were many illegal activities and attempts by one of his woman followers to transfer a large sum of money to Germany. He was extradited from America, but the cult lives on in India and other countries.

Later on in India, Vam Margis influenced the writings of Puranas (Indian religious works written between 1500 to 2000 years ago) and the cult of Dev Dasis in South India drew its inspiration from them. Some of them traveled to Tibet where they influenced Tibetan Buddhism.

Teachings of King Rishabh Dev

The king despised Vam Margis and he took them at their word when they told him that the authority of Vedas sanctioned all their rituals. The king had never studied Vedas himself. His points of criticisms were;

1. If the sacrificed animal goes to heaven, why doesn't the host of the fire ceremony kill his relatives and thus help them to get to heaven sooner and enjoy eternal bliss.(King is right in his criticism of his Priests but he does not know that

animal sacrifice is not only not sanctioned in Vedas but it is forbidden to commit any violence towards any living beings).

2. Brahmins claim that by feeding them, the food reaches to our dead relatives. But if it were true, there is no need for a traveler to carry food with him. His family could feed a Brahmin and the traveler should feel no hunger. Since it does not happen in this world, it is a fraud perpetrated by the Brahmins to assure a good living for themselves.(King is right to say so, but this ritual was not sanctioned in Vedas or Manu Samriti).

Large number of people became followers of the King Rishabh Dev and he is the founder of Jain religion in India. Unfortunately the king had not studied Vedas and he blamed Vedas for sanctioning such practices. Many of his followers destroyed Vedas and other scriptures derived from them. The religion spread in North India but did not make much head way in the South.

After his death, the Jainis started making idols of the king turned preacher and established them in the temples. From Rishabh dev to Mahavira, there were twenty-four masters also known as Tirthankaras. The followers of the religion worship the idols of their Thirthankaras in the temples. One of the most important tenets of Jain religion is the practice of nonviolence towards all living beings. They are naturally strict vegetarians. The practice of worshipping idols started with the followers of Jain religion. The study of Vedas and related scriptures declined. The Jain religion was very dominant in India between 2500 to 3000 years ago.

Buddhism

About 2500 years ago, Prince Siddhartha was born in the town of Kapilvastu located at the border of present day state of Uttar

Pradesh and Nepal. From an early age, he became very curious about the problem of human suffering, its cause and how to prevent and eliminate it. He would question the learned men of the kingdom and had no interest in hunting, wines, women and parties that most young men of his age indulged in. His father got alarmed at his strong desire to renounce the worldly pleasures and investigate the problem of human sufferings. He got him married to a beautiful and noble princess Yashodhara and they had a son named Rahul. But Prince Siddhartha felt trapped in the marriage and longed to leave and study Yoga. One day at midnight, he left his wife, young son and the kingdom and wandered into jungles to meditate. After six years of Yoga and meditation, he became a Buddha (the enlightened one). He traveled far and wide and preached in India. He was a contemporary of Mahavira, the last Thirthankara of the Jain religion. Basic tenets of Buddhism are that there are four universal truths.

1. There is suffering- Being born, getting old, dying, sorrow, crying, disease, anxiety, agitation, all of these and many more cause great suffering, pain and sorrow. Look all around you, there is suffering everywhere.

2. What is the cause of this suffering? In one word, Desires. A desire lead to thoughts, memory, likes and dislikes and one tries to acquire what one likes and avoid that which causes pain. All worldly pleasures are transitory. Because of his Karmas, he falls into the cycles of reincarnations

3. There is permanent cure of this suffering. First weaken and then completely eliminate Desires.

4. Buddha described eightfold path (the middle way) to achieve this state devoid of all suffering. This is very similar to Yoga as described in the previous chapter. There are excellent books available about Buddhism.

It is important to note that that Buddha himself never wrote any book. His disciples later on wrote down most of his teachings. He died at the age of eighty years. He started many monasteries where celibate young men and women disciples lived in austere conditions, went out to beg for their meals to learn humility and studied, taught and spread the teachings of Buddha far and wide. The Buddhist priests went as missionaries to China, Southeast Asia, Middle East, Egypt and Greece. There are stories of dialogues between the Greek philosophers and Buddhist Mendicants (Bhikshuks) and Yogis. There was a great king Ashoka who converted to Buddhism and helped it to spread to many parts of the world. At present, millions of people follow Buddhism but it did not do well in the country of its birth. Let us examine the causes of its decline.

1. The disciples of Buddha started making his idols like the Jainies and started worshipping him in the temples.

2. The Buddhist did not believe in God and were thought to be atheists

3. Because of close proximity of young men and women in the monasteries who were supposed to be celibate, there were examples of pregnancies and occasional sexual scandals, which hurt their prestige.

4. Once the religious leaders accepted the support of a king, they acquired power and status and like most human beings, they abused their power and brought disrespect on their religion.

5. The religion broke into four branches and this further weakened the religion. There was no body of work written by The Buddha and many disciples added their own ideas and modified the teachings. Buddhists believe in strict nonviolence yet there are some Buddhists who do eat meat. The religion deteriorated into idol worshipping.

6. Their preaching of nonviolence in all circumstances and its adoption by some kings weakened their military and defense preparedness. This made the country a prey to outside invaders.

7. The last but not the least was the scholarly attack on the basic tenets and teachings of Buddhism by a great Brahmin scholar from South India, Shankaracharya.

Shankaracharya and his crusade against Jainism and Buddhism

Shankaracharya was born in the province of Kerala, South India. His father died when he was very young and his mother raised him. Theirs' was a respectable and well off Brahmin family. From very young age, the boy was very interested in knowledge of scriptures. His mother sent him to Gopadhacharya for his education. The mother was looking forward to the day when he will finish his education, get married and take charge of family farms and property. But Shankaracharya longed to get away and enter the fourth stage of life, Sanyasa (renunciation). The legend has it that when he was only eight years old, while close to a river, he threatened his mother that either she should permit him to join the order of renunciates (Sanyasa) or he would drown himself in the river.

Reluctantly the mother agreed and he devoted his full energies to the pursuit of knowledge and Yoga. At the age of 22 years, he formally entered Sanyasa and started traveling all over the country to preach. He was very brilliant and an excellent debater. He felt that the Jainism and Buddhism were atheist religions and had fallen into idol worship of their erstwhile teachers; who were noble yet fallible human beings and not worthy of worship.

Shankaracharya went to the city of Ujjain (Central India) and started to preach Vedic religion in the city. The king of the city, Sudhanwa, believed in Jain religion and he was very

scholarly person. Shankaracharya visited the king and implored him to arrange a religious debate between him (a proponent of Vedic teachings) and the religious scholars of Jain religion on this condition that the loser in the debate will renounce his religion and embrace the religion of the victor including the king.

The king accepted his conditions, invited scholars of Jain religion and convened the debate with impartial judges. The debate went on for days and eventually Shankaracharya was declared the winner. The Jain teachers and the king Sudhanwa renounced Jain religion and accepted Vedic religion. There was great noise and stir about this news all over the country. The king wrote letters to his friends recommending Shankaracharya to them and made arrangements for Shankaracharya to travel and have religious debates with the leaders of Jain and Buddhism.

The study of Vedas was started once again in the country. He wanted to remove the idols from the temples and use them as schools to teach Vedas and other scriptures. Many priest hated him because they no longer controlled the lucrative temple properties and all the wealth donated to the temples by the devotees of Jain religion. He traveled all over the country and by Herculean effort and great force of his personality, revived Vedic studies in the country. He established four orders of Brahamcharis and four orders of Sanyasis in four corners of the country. Shankaracharya had two disciples, who had renounced Jain religion and now used to help and serve him. But inwardly they hated him and they slowly poisoned Shankaracharya. In six months, the great man died at the age of 32 years.

Swami Shankaracharya established four monasteries in four corners of India in order to unite all the Sanyasis and encouraged

them to preserve the study and teaching of the Vedic scriptures and practical knowledge of Yoga.

1. In North India, he established the Jyotir Math (monastery) in the region of Badrinarayan in the Himalayas. The Brahamcharis of Jyotir Math use the word Aanand after their given name. The Sanyasis of this Math have these three last names; Giri, Parvat and Sagar. In other words if you know their last names, you can tell from which Math they are from.

2. Near Kanya Kumari in South India, Shringeri Math was established. The last name of Brahamcharis is Chaitanya and that of Sanyasis are Sarasvati, Puri and Bharti.

3. In East India, monastery was called Govardhan Math. Brahamcharis are called Prakash and Sanyasis are called Van and Aaranya.

4. Sharda Math was located near Dwarika in West India. Brahamcharis are named Swaroop and Sanyasis, Thirth and Aashram.

Shankaracharya directed four of his disciples to run these schools. This tradition goes on to this day and there are four Shankaracharya from these monasteries. The Sanyasis travel all over the country and teach Yoga and preach the scriptures. They all study Vedanta and call themselves Vedanti. The basic teachings in practice are according to Vedas but there are theoretical differences between Vedantic teachings and Vedic principles.

Shankaracharya based his teachings on eleven Upanishadas, Uttar Mimansa or Vedant (the sixth school of philosophy written by Vyasa) and Bhagwad Geeta by Vyasa too. Through out the religious history of India, all the six schools of philosophy have been considered complimentary and in

concordance with Vedic teachings, but for the first time, Shankaracharya stated that Vedanta by Vyasa and Yoga by Patajali were the only correct schools of philosophy and he severely criticized the teachings in Sankhya Shastra by Kapil and Nyaya Shastra by Gautama. Why? Let us examine the differences between Vedic view and Vedantic teachings of Shankaracharya.

1. Both of them agree that God or Brahma is Conscious, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is formless, all knowing and eternally blissful. He creates, sustains and dissolves the universe and gives all the Jivas (souls) the fruit of their actions. Both believe in Laws of Karma, reincarnation and practice of Yoga to achieve Emancipation (Nirvana or Mukti).

2. Vedas state that there are two conscious (chetan) eternal entities, God and Souls, which are the efficient causes of creation, and primordial matter is nonliving, inert (Jarh) and lacks any awareness and is the material cause of the universe. This is called Traitvad (trio of causes) or Dvaitvad (duality) if you count God and souls as one category (Chetan) and matter the second (Jarh). This view has been very forcefully explained in Sankhya and Nyaya Shastra.

   Shankaracharya states that Brahma or God is the only efficient and material cause of the universe and this view is called Advaitvad (one cause of all the creation-Pantheism).

   The Vedic scholars countered that if Brahma is purely conscious entity, how come the world that came out of Him is inert, lacks knowledge and awareness because according to Vedic principle, conscious cannot become inert and vice versa.

   Shankaracharya answered the objection by stating that there is a power that is part of Brahma called Maya. According

to him, this Maya is an illusion and Brahma out of this Maya creates the visible universe. This Maya makes up the solar systems, Astral Bodies and gross bodies etc. And he further states that this Maya obscures parts of Brahma, and those parts become ignorant and are called Jivas or souls. And through knowledge and Yoga, the Jiva (soul) realizes his confusion and becomes emancipated.

Vedic scholars objected by saying that Brahma is pure consciousness and how can be mixed with inert matter, become ignorant.

3. Verses in Vedas and related scriptures refer to Brahma (God) as Advait. It is matter of interpretation.

   Shankaracharya and his followers interpret it to mean," Brahma alone exists, there is nothing else" and hence his explanation is based on that meaning.

   Rishi Dayananda also accepts that the word Advait refers to Brahma but he interprets it as," Aa-dvitiya, that God is unique and special, there is none other who is better or even equal to Him in His powers but the souls and matter which are of lesser power and significance than Him also exist" Dayananda accepts the word Maya as synonym for Prakriti (Primordial Matter- the material cause of the creation) with definite existence. Matter is not an illusion but is real.

4. Because Shankaracharya's idea is contradicted in Vedas, schools of philosophy and his detractors say, even by his chosen books, he has criticized Kapil of Sankhya and Gautama of Nyaya schools of philosophy because these schools believe in Traitvad (trio of causes). He wrote commentaries on Upanishadas, Vedanta and Geeta (written by Vyasa) and interpreted the verses in these scriptures in a fashion that at least according to him and his followers prov the principle of Advaitvad (one cause).

There have been disagreements over this view from the time of Shankaracharya and many scholars including Rishi Dayananda (founder of Arya Samaj) disagree with him and believe in Dvaitvad (duality) or Traitvad while Swami Ram Krishan Paramhans and Swami Vivekanand have been great luminaries in Vedanta. Vedanta is very vigorous part of Hindu religion in modern India. To examine the arguments, one should read Satyarth Prakash by Dayananda. I have extensively studied both points of view and in my humble opinion, I find that Traitvad (trio of causes) to be more logical and that is why it is the basis of this book. Nevertheless, Shankaracharya was an extraordinary scholar and Yogi and in such a short lifespan, left his deep imprint on the Hindu religion. The nation owes him a great debt of gratitude that his followers preserved Vedic scriptures and practice of Yoga, which has been passed on from teacher to disciple.

Vikramaditya

Vikramaditya was a famous and noble ruler. His life is well documented in modern Indian history books. I only mention his name because a calendar had been named after him, Vikramaditya Samvat. This calendar is 57 years older than modern western system and was started 2057 years ago. It is used all over India even today.

During his reign, the worship of Shiva became very popular. Now Shiva was a great and noble king in northern Himalayan region and his wife's name was Parvati. They were called incarnation of God and Vam Margis and other priests started worshipping the couple. The Vam Margis worship Parvati as Devi while other priests (Shivaites) worship the husband Shiva. Both of them, Vam Margis and Shivites besmear their bodies with ashes and wear rosaries, the beads of which are made out of Rudraksh tree. Many of their Priests wear several of these rosaries around their head, neck, and wrists and around the

ears. Later on the Vam Margis and Shivites introduced the worship of male and female sexual organs and called them Linga and Jaldhari respectively. They began to look upon the worship of Rudrakh tree, stone images and reproductive organs as the sole means of attaining righteous ends, wealth, the fulfillment of legitimate desires and even salvation. There are many temples in India today, which are dedicated to Shiva and Parvati. Many people celebrate Shivratri, the birthday of Shiva and imbibe drinks mixed with marijuana (bhang). Some of the Shivaite priests are regular marijuana smokers.

King Bhartri Hari

He was a great Sanskrit scholar and a noble king. He was very devoted to his wife who unfortunately was cheating on him. When he found it out, he was heart broken. He renounced his kingdom and became a mendicant and has written a Sanskrit book of poetry, which is often quoted. The book is in three parts. In one part he castigates women and himself for being gullible. Other chapter deals with the importance most of us give to money. One of the poem reads," I have same eyes, same appearance, same intelligence but after I lost my wealth, in the eyes of some, it is as if I have ceased to exist". The third chapter deals with Yoga, difficulty of concentrating the restless mind and his inner struggle during meditation. Let me quote some of the poems;

1. I didn't enjoy the worldly pleasures; it is as if they wore me down. I didn't pass the time; the time has passed me by. The desires are still vigorous and young, but I have become old.

2. I am old, weak and unsteady on my feet. Yet when the thought that the death is near comes to me, I start shaking with fear.

3. When will that day come when I will be so deep in

meditation, oblivious of my surroundings that a gentle black deer will be rubbing against my body to satisfy its itching, thinking of me as a piece of stone because of my stillness.

May be one day, I can translate this book into English for my readers.

King Bhoja

King Bhoja was a very learned ruler about 1500 years ago. During his reign, he patronized artistic poetry. A shepherd named Kalidas wrote the book Raghuvansha, the poetry rendition of the epic Ramayana.

During the time of king Bhoja, some priests wrote Markandeya and Shiva Puranas but when they published it, they wrote down falsely that the Sage Vyasa was the author. King Bhoja had studied books by Sage Vyasa and when he heard about it, he had these two writers arrested and punished them harshly by cutting off their hands. He stated that they were free to write their opinions but to use some great man's name to give credibility to their writings and to perpetrate fraud on the people was a crime. Now it was well known that Sage Vyasa had died 3500 years before the time of Bhoja.

It is also written by King Bhoja that Sage Vyasa wrote 4400 verses and his disciples wrote additional 5600 verses and the original epic Mahabharata had 10,000 verses. Many dishonest priests added more verses to the original epic without acknowledging their authorship. In the time of King Vikramaditya, the number of verses in Mahabharata rose to twenty thousand and during the reign of King Bhoja; it had increased to thirty thousand verses.

King Bhoja was aware of this disgusting practice and one of the reasons for strict punishment was to try to put a halt to

this practice of adding and distorting the ancient scriptures. He further states that if books like Puranas got published in the name of great Sages of the past with no redeeming value, great confusion and ignorance will spread in the country. Unfortunately the forces of corruption and deceit prevailed despite his valiant attempts to stop them.

In the book Bhoja Prabhand (Administration and life and times of Bhoja), there is mention of very clever inventions. There is description of a cart like machine that could travel at 55 miles an hour on land and could even fly in air. There is mention of a fan that gave good circulation of air but what was the source of energy, is not clear.

Idol Worship and Age of Puranas

After the death of Shankaracharya, The Abbots of the Maths (monasteries) gained great wealth and power and some of them started living a life of ease and luxury. Some of them declared Shankaracharya an incarnation of Lord Shiva and started idol worship. The Buddhism almost disappeared but adherent of Jain religion continued to worship their Thirthankaras.

Many other priests decided to emulate the Jain priests because it was very profitable venture. They wrote eighteen religious books and called them Puranas. They further falsely asserted that Sage Vyasa had authored these books. This was a lie because Sage Vyasa had died about 3000 years ago. They picked up historical characters and asserted that they were the incarnation of God Himself. So great and noble kings of the past, Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Indra, Vishnu, Brahma, Narayana etc. were pressed into service as incarnations of God.

There are eighteen Puranas and eighteen Sub Puranas. The followers erected temples and placed idols of their gods in these temples. A lazy, indolent and ignorant but dishonest priestly class arose which controlled the property and money given to

the temples in donations by the ignorant devotees. There is some history, religious sayings in Puranas but there are many impossible and illogical nonsense is also written.

For example, they wrote that Lord Krishna used to steal butter in his childhood, hid clothes from the bathing young maidens and would not give them their clothes back to them till he forced them to expose themselves, that he had 16,000 wives and that sort of garbage.

Now when we read the history of Lord Krishna as written by Sage Vyasa, we find out that Krishna was a very brave, learned, compassionate ruler. He fought against injustice and always protected the innocents. He was great Yogi and never sought name or fame but in his time 5200 years ago, he was loved and revered by the masses, Sages and scholars alike and feared by dishonest rulers. He had only one wife named Rukmani and they were very devoted to each other.

Thus Puranas distorted the history and tried to defame a great man. Some of this fabrication of the stories is mainly the influence of Vam Margis too. Compared to the elegance and lucidity of Vedas and Vedic literature, Puranas are very illogical, full of historical distortions, outright fabrication of stories and many mistakes. The people of country became broken up in to the devotees of Shiva, Rama, Krishna, and Vishnu etc. and because of great strife and jealousy amongst these sub sects, great divisiveness and animosities were created. Many followers of Shiva would not have marriage or other relationship with people belonging to followers of Vishnu or Rama etc. This further fractured the nation in to many religious factions.

Vaishnava Sect

The Vaishnava sect was established 150 years after the death of King Bhoja. The founder of this sect was Shathkopa, who was

the son of a prostitute. Next teachers were Munivahna, Yavanacharya and Ramanujam. The last one was most successful in gaining adherents. Vaishnavites wrote Vishnu Purana. Vishnu is a Sanskrit word and it is one of the names ascribed to God in Vedic literature. Vishnu means omnipresent and for this reason, God is called Vishnu. Obviously there was a king named Vishnu who is thought to be incarnation of God by this sect. Many scholars claim that there is history in Vedas by seeing such names like Vishnu or Indra, are not familiar with the Vedic grammar and rules of interpreting the verses of Veda.

2. Many temples have been used by some priests for promiscuous ends like Dev Dasis in certain temples in South India.

3. Because of idol worshipping, there is no unity of faith because of petty selfish attitudes of priestly class. It has led to divisiveness and strife in the country.

4. Because of the false belief of the priests in their idols, they discouraged the kings to prepare against the attacks of foreign invaders. This led to the defeat and enslavement to invaders like Mohammad Gauri, Temur Lane etc.

5. Wasting your time in idol worshipping, you are deprived of the benefits of the practice of Yoga and meditation as sanctioned in Vedic Scriptures.

It is absolutely certain that there is no mention or sanction of idol worshipping in Vedic literatures. The tradition started with Jain and Buddhist religions. There were idol worship and fertility rites in many Middle East cultures of those times and they may have influenced the natives because there was significant trade and travel to India since the time of Alexander.

Q. What do you think of visiting sacred places (Thirthas) because if you pray and bathe there, all you sins are forgiven?

A. Thirtha is a Sanskrit word which means any agency, object or means that helps you cross a body of water, ocean or life. Therefore, study of Vedas, association with men of learning, promotion of public good, practice of Yoga, honoring and serving you parents and teachers, meditation upon God etc are real Thirthas because they help you cross the ocean of misery and sorrow in this world. A boat or ship can also be called a Thirtha.

Therefore Tirtha Yatra (visiting sacred places) is really of no benefit at all. And according to Bhagvad Geeta, the result of any Karma is unavoidable whether it is good or bad and you either enjoy happiness or suffer as a result of it. Therefore the mere act of bathing in a river or visiting a sacred place (Thirtha) cannot abrogate the Laws of Karma. Unfortunately visiting sacred places (Thirth Yatra) is a very profitable business for priests of various temples and tourism industry but except for pleasure of traveling, it cannot wash your sins.

Kabir

There was a weaver in the city of Benares, in India and he was childless. One day he found an abandoned new born infant lying amongst flowers in a basket by the roadside. The weaver and his wife adopted and raised the child.

He wanted to study scriptures but was spurned by the arrogant Priests because according to them he was of low caste and unworthy of hearing the word of God. He started composing poetry, spoke ill of Vedas and developed a following.

The noise one hears on closing one's ears is called Anahat Shabda. The activity of restless mind is called Surati. To direct

that in hearing Anahat Shabda is considered the highest contemplation of God and is the mark of a Sant (holy man).

He clearly has no knowledge of Yoga. His poetry is quite good and very popular in India to this day.

Sikh religion

Guru Nanak was the founder of Sikh religion. He believes in worship of God with Mantra Yoga by reciting Om, Laws of Karma and reincarnation of souls. He was truly a reformer of Hindu religion and its entrenched, horrible practices of caste system, untouchability, poor treatment of Shudras and women. He spoke forcefully against the practice of caste system and its evils. He started the practice of communal eating (Langar) to break caste barriers. Let me quote some of the sayings of Guru Nanak;

1. Everywhere I look, I find people suffering in this world. The only way to be happy and free from suffering is to have God's name (Nam) as a foundation of your life. Om is the only true Nam (God's name).
2. The intoxication from marijuana, Bhang (a drink made with marijuana), and alcohol is very temporary. You use them at night and the effect is gone the next day. The intoxication of God's name is permanent and I am immersed in its effect night and day.
3. Nanak says that you should worship the only God who is present everywhere. Why should I worship any other being that is born and then dies?

There were ten Gurus in Sikh religion. The Mughal Emperors ruled the country and Shah Jahan and his son Aurangjeb were particularly cruel. Shah Jehan killed Guru Arjun Dev. Guru Teg Bahadur (9th Guru) was assassinated by Aurangjeb in Delhi, India. Gurudwara (place of worship by Sikhs) Sis Gunj was

erected by his disciples at the site of his martyrdom.

Guru Gobind Singh (10th Guru) brought a great regeneration of spirit and courage and fought guerilla wars against Aurangjeb. He introduced five Kakars (symbols starting with the word K) and his followers accepted them in their day today life. They included wearing of shorts (Kachha), unshorn hair (Kesh), comb (Kangha), bracelet (Karha) and a dagger (Kripan). Guru wanted to end the caste system and asked his followers to use the word Singh (lion) at the end of their name rather than their caste in the case of men and use the word Kaur at the end of the name of women.

Guru Gobind was truly a philosopher king. He sacrificed his life and that of four of his brave sons. Two of his sons were captured by Aurangjeb's forces and were buried alive. The others died in battle. Before his death, Guru Gobind Singh decreed the end of Gurus and made the sacred book of Sikhs, The Guru Granth the eternal Guru (Teacher). The book contains the teachings of all the Gurus. The Sikhs have established many Gurudwara, the places of worship. All the Sikhs by and large follow the five symbols (Kakars) of their religion. This is only a brief outline. The interested reader can find many works of scholars to learn more about it.

Rishi Dayananda

He was born in mid 1800's in Gujrat, Western India in a wealthy family. His childhood name was Mool Shankar. From very young age, he saw his sister and beloved uncle die and he started asking as to what death was and how can one escape from it or vanquish it. Every one told him that only by practice of Yoga, could one transcend the fear of death. He pledged to learn Yoga.

His father was a Shivaite and at the age of fourteen, the son went on a fast in a temple and was assured that after midnight,

the Lord Shiva will appear to him. Everyone in the temple started to get sleepy but the little boy was very alert. Then he saw a mouse, which went on the idol of Shiva and started eating the food that was offered to the Idol. The boy started asking that if this idol cannot defend its food from a mere mouse, how can it create and protect the whole universe. He asked this question to many scholars, priests and his father but found no answer.

He started talking about leaving his home to find true Shiva (God). His parents arranged a marriage for him but one night, he left his home for good at the age of 21 years. His father found him and while he was bringing him home, he escaped again and never saw his family again.

He started to search for teachers and Yogis. He became a Sanyasi (to renounce worldly life) and changed his name to Dayananda. After an arduous search, he was taught Yoga by two yogis. He had great success in learning Yoga and he advocated for India's freedom.

He met a blind teacher, Guru Virajanand, who taught him the true grammar of Vedas (Ashtadhyayi by Sage Panini and Mahabhashya by Sage Patanjali), which made it possible for him to study and intrepret Vedas. Swami Dayananda was a remarkable man. Let me list few of his achievements;

1. He single handedly found, collated and published the four Vedas and revived the study and research in Vedic education. He wrote commentaries on Yajur Veda and seven chapters of Rigveda, the work was interrupted by his untimely death.

2. He spoke out against the practice of idol worship and in the tradition of Shankaracharya, held many religious debates which he decisively won. He made powerful enemies who tried to poison and kill him several times. He challenged the scholars all over India to show him a single verse in

Vedas, which sanctioned the idol worship. No scholar was ever successful.

3. He preached against the curse of mistreatment of Shudras and women and tried to end the caste system.
4. He strongly spoke out for women's rights of education, condemned the practice of child marriages, practice of Sati (burning wife after husband's death) encouraged remarriage of widows and recommended that women learn Yoga.
5. He wrote a large body of religious writings, which still continue to amaze and guide many aspirants in the path of Vedic studies and Yoga.
6. He was a patriot and always preached that the colonial rule of British must be opposed and be replaced by democratic self- rule.

When he was about 55 years old, he was poisoned and died a short time later. He was the founder of Arya Samaj and most of the ideas written in this book have been inspired by his writings and teachings.

Islam in India

From about 1200 years, there were raids in India by Mughal despots who looted and killed in Northern India. They destroyed temples, stole fortunes from them and enslaved many people. Later on, the Mughal Empire established itself in India. All this is described in many history books in India. Suffice it to say that Emperor Aurangjeb placed a very severe tax on non-Muslims called Zajia and many Hindus were coerced to convert to Islam. Maulana Aajad and Mr. Nehru have stated that 90 to 95% of Muslims in India are descendents of Hindus who freely or forcibly converted into Islam.

Christians in India

The British came to India as East India Company about 350

years ago for trading. In time, they defeated the Mughal Empire and controlled most of the country. The British had a twofold policy:

1. Many Missionaries followed and converted Indians and especially horribly treated Shudras by persuasion, offer of good jobs and better social status. The orthodox Hindus deserve all the blame for letting their fellow brethren down and mistreating them for centuries.

2. Lord Macaulay introduced an education policy in India, which had a lasting influence in India long after British have gone. Lord Macaulay stated that he was going to introduce an education policy in India in which Indians will lose all respect for their culture and will become model colonial citizens of British Empire.

3. In the same vein, Professor Max Muller was recruited and was brought to India. He collated and published all four Vedas and wrote about them. His real motive becomes obvious from a letter he wrote to his wife in England.

   He wrote to her that Indian society had great reverence for Vedas. He wanted to publish and translate the Vedas and prove to the educated Indians that the Vedas were nothing more than the Shepherds Songs. Then he felt, it would be easy to convert them into Christianity.

   His translations of Vedas followed literal translation of commentaries on Vedas by a scholar Sayanacharya. Max Muller had very minimal knowledge of Vedic Grammar. The translations of Sayanacharya are also very poor and biased to denigrate the teachings in Vedas.

   Fortunately, Rishi Dayananda was aware of his writings and he forcefully criticized them, pointed out many errors in the translation and published correct translations himself. Unfortunately, many educated Indians are poorly acquainted

with their marvelous heritage of Vedas and Vedic literature. I hope this book serves as an initial effort to remedy that situation.

This is a brief summary of evolution, deterioration and lately some revival of ancient Vedic religion and other religions in India.

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The Soul, Astral Body and Prana

Two friends live in the same house. People know and see only one of them; they have no idea about the existence of the other. One of these friends is immortal while the other can not escape death. Even though they have totally opposite nature, they appear to be inseparable friends. What have brought them together are insatiable desires. So long as the desires for pleasures persist, these friends will remain together. Caught in the chains of unfulfilled desires, this immortal friend (Soul) carries its mortal (Body) companion from one life to another. Seeking pleasures, soul does good and bad Karmas. When it does bad Karmas, it is forced to go in to lower forms of life and when it performs good and noble actions, it enjoys worldly pleasures. Entangled in the web of their own making, they both always travel together. Isn't is amazing that we only see the mortal body and are completely unaware of the eternal soul?

(Rig Veda chapter 1. 164. Verse 38. Atharva Veda 9, 10, Verse 16)

I have mentioned about the soul and the astral body frequently. Let us review their interrelationship.

The soul is a distinct conscious entity. There is a word used to refer to God; Sat-Chit Aanand.

1. Sat means something that actually exists. Prakriti (matter), soul and God are all Sat.
2. Chit means something that has consciousness, awareness, and qualities of decision, discretion and freedom to change direction. Only God and souls have this quality.
3. Aanand means bliss. That is a permanent quality of God. The souls are searching for it and only achieve it during state of emancipation (a.k.a-Mukti, Moksha, Nirvana, Self Realization).

Now a human being consists of Body and Astral body made up of matter (Sat) and a soul (chit). The matter is an integral part of any living being because they are made of a soul and body therefore living beings are Sat +Chit. The only thing it lacks and has been

searching for eons of time is Bliss (Aanand). The soul has been searching for bliss in material things but the search will be unsuccessful because Prakriti (Matter) does not have bliss and has none to give. When I want a loan, I go to a rich person who is capable of giving. Whether he gives it to me or not will depend upon my credit rating. So the soul has to beseech God for the bliss for it is only in His power to give. Whether or not He gives it will depend upon my Karmic bank balance.

Qualities of Soul

1. The soul is very subtle conscious entity. Each soul is distinct from each other and exists separate from God. The soul is eternal i.e. it was never born and it will never die. In Bhagvad Geeta, Krishna states that the soul is indestructible. The fire cannot burn it, the air cannot desiccate it, water cannot wet it, and the sword cannot cut it. It is timeless.

2. The soul has two eternal qualities; desire for knowledge and actions based on that knowledge. These quality remains with soul even during emancipation. That is why when soul attains the body; it has five organs of senses to acquire knowledge and five motor functions to translate that knowledge into action.

3. These are the attributes, which when present, are indirect proof that a being has a soul.

   a. Desire for acquisition of things, hate or jealousy, effort, feelings of happiness, of sorrow and pain and consciousness.(Nyaya Shastra chapter 1 verse 10).

   b. In additions to these attributes, Vaishashik Shastra says," Breathing in and breathing out, opening and closing of eyelids, organic growth, discernment, memory and individuality, movement, regulation of the senses, internal changes and disorders, such as hunger and thirst, joy or sorrow etc. are also attributes of soul.

These attributes manifest themselves only so long as the soul is present in the body, but cease to exist as soon as soul leaves it.

Therefore presence of soul in a living being is known by its attributes. There is very beautiful description of Soul and body relationship in Kathopanishada.

1. The soul is eternal, was never born and never dies. It is only the body that dies.
2. By reading scriptures or engaging in great debates or arguments, one cannot learn this knowledge. It is the practical use of that knowledge and grace of God that is absolutely necessary.
3. Who will achieve Self Realization? The person who lives an unethical life, who is very restless and full of desires and has no control over his mind and body, has no hope of being successful in this Path.
4. Imagine that the body is like a chariot. The soul is its master and travels in it. Buddhi (Intellect-part of Astral Body) is the driver of this chariot. Mana (mind-part of Astral Body) is the reins, that control the ten horses (five sensory and five motor organs), which pull this chariot on the road of life. Then it is a question of who is in charge in your life? For most of us, the sensory pleasures and their gratification occupy most of our time. When the horses are in charge, they take the chariot wherever they please and we enjoy transitory pleasures and sufferings. In the life of Yogi, he has central control. His mind, intellect and sensory motor systems obey him. For an aspirant, he has to become aware and start gaining control of his life from the periphery to the center.

The Astral Body, (Sukshm Sharir) Microscopic Body

I have already written about Astral Body (Suksham Sharir) in chapter on creation. The Astral Body is made out of the first change that happens in the Primordial Particles after their state of equilibrium is disrupted. Sankhya Shastra calls the first effect of creation as Mahat Tattva (? Quarks).

Nanotechnology is going to make it possible for the scientists to create many small but powerful devices using molecules or even atoms. In similar way, is it possible that God has already created extremely microscopic yet very versatile and powerful Astral Bodies using sub atomic particles and provided one to every living being? The Astral Body enables the soul to take control of body, keep its myriads of autonomic functions of breathing, digestion, metabolism and growth possible and coordinate sensory motor functions.

The Astral Body consists of seventeen entities;

a. Mana(mind)-

1. This is the seat of memory, recipient of information from sense organs which it passes it on to the Soul, and controls motor functions that it carries out at the behest of the soul.
2. Mana is like a backup memory device to the memory banks of the brain.
3. All our thoughts reside in Mana part of the Astral Body. A small part of it is conscious and most of it is unconscious.
4. The memories of the past lives and the present life are stored in it and during the fifth stage of Yoga, when mind becomes one point focused; the memories of past lives come back to the Yogi since the soul can read the stored information in it. The soul is more microscopic than Astral Body and conscious and is able to derive the stored information.

b. Buddhi-

The principle of intellect acts as evaluator of all the information furnished to the soul and recommends a course of action that is executed by Mana.

c. The five sensory organs and five motor functions are also represented on the Astral Body.

d. Five microscopic representatives (Prana) that hold the Astral Body together are also parts of Astral body. The Prana control the autonomic nervous system and processes of breathing,

digestion, cardiovascular function, reproduction and metabolism.

When the soul starts the cycle of life and death after emancipation, it gets enveloped by an Astral Body. At that time, the soul acquires a sense of I-ness (Ahambhav), and the extraordinary powers of soul to acquire knowledge and act become limited. Further limitations are imposed depending upon the body that the soul receives. After the death, the soul leaves the body wrapped within the Astral Body and starts the new birth based upon its Karmas. The cycle of life and death goes on for eons of time till that soul gets emancipated.

The direction of emancipation is exactly reverse. By practice of Yoga, one becomes unaware of the body by learning to concentrate on one thought and when the power of the soul expresses itself through the Astral body, its capacity to learn and act appears very extraordinary to ordinary people like us.

You see, it is not the Astral Body or the brain or the eyes (that are made out of matter) that see; the real observer is the soul. During fifth stage of Yoga, the soul sees through the Astral body and since the latter is made up of sub atomic particles, Yogi can see beyond walls and can see things buried underground just as with the use of x-rays in cat scans or magnetic resonance imaging machines we can see great details of deeper structures of human bodies. Similarly, other senses of Yogi also are heightened in their power and subtlety of perception e.g. very acute hearing, power of smell etc.

In higher stages, the mind becomes silent and the soul transcends the limitations of Astral body and in the ultimate stage the soul sheds the Astral body to be emancipated. The state of mind can be illustrated by these two descriptions.

1. Imagine a person who has always lived in a place where the sky is always cloudy and he has never seen the sunshine. If you tell him about a place where there are no clouds and sun shines in a beautiful blue sky, he will not believe you

unless you either fly him up in an airplane above the clouds or take him to a place where weather is sunny. Similarly, our mind is full of clouds of desires, anger, greed, attachment, fear, jealousy, arrogance etc., and we have no concept of a special state where mind becomes silent and the sun of true knowledge starts shining.

2. Imagine a person who is sitting next to a shallow pond of water. He wants to see the bottom of the pond but he keeps on stirring the mud in the pond with a stick. How can he be successful? Similarly, we are constantly stirring the mud of desires, greed etc., in our mind. When we stop doing that, the mind will become calm and we will be able to see its depth and benefit from it.

The Yogis say that once you have some success in calming the mind through the practice of Yoga and meditation, the priorities in your life will change dramatically. Now we have time for pleasures but can't seem to find the time for meditation. This reverses completely once you get an initial taste of the nectar of that abiding peace and joy.

Prana (Chi in Chinese writings)

According to the scriptures, Prana is the original energy that God uses to start the creation and every soul receives a small portion of it to run the autonomic functions of the body e.g. circulation, digestion, metabolism etc. Prana is also the energy that binds the Astral Body with soul on the one hand and to the body on the other. In the body, the Prana is divided in to five types with different functions;

1. **Prana-** It controls the act of respiration which is partially under our control; in other words we can hold our breath for very short period of time. The Yogi by practicing the fourth step of Yoga, Pranayama (breath control) can hold his breath for long periods of time and slowly can extend his control

over cardiovascular, digestive and metabolic functions.

2. Apan- this energy controls the excretory functions e.g. urinary and stool elimination and childbirth.

3. Saman- this controls peristaltic activity and digestive process in the digestive system.

4. Vyan- this controls the circulatory system.

5. Udan- It is all over the body. This Prana is used to talk and sing and is activated at the time of death and takes the Astral Body and the soul out of the body.

Death at the chosen time (Ichha Mritu)

Advanced Yogis by controlling this Prana can chose the time of their death and voluntarily leave the body with the soul and Astral Body.

The question arises, is it suicide?

The answer is no. It is suicide only if an ordinary person kills himself either due to deep depression, sense of hopelessness or to escape unpleasant situation in life. When a Yogi dies at will, he is doing it with full realization that useful purpose for which he was born is over and he needs to move on. He leaves his body in a state of great calmness and equanimity.

These Prana control the autonomic nervous system in the body, but a Yogi gradually learns to bring these autonomic functions under his conscious control. Thus with the practice of Pranayama (Breath Control), Yogi can hold his breath for long periods of time. He uses it to first concentrate and then transcend his mental restlessness. Similarly he can control his circulation and metabolism. Many Yogis can concentrate this Prana power and can use it for healing the afflicted.

Prana is the binding force that binds the soul, Astral Body and the gross body together. There are ten Chakras (Energy Centers) where Astral Body exerts its control over the rest of the body.

By concentrating his Pranic energy in these centers, Yogi learns the inner functioning of his body and he can repair or enhance his body and mental health. By learning about these Chakras, Yogi can take his soul and Astral body out of his body as if on a tether and see and learn about things far away.

By leading a moral and ethical life, practice of eight steps of Yoga, strengthens and brings Prana under Yogi's conscious control. Violence, eating meat, use of intoxicants, defects of mind (desires, anger, greed, attachment and arrogance) dissipate and weaken the Pranic energy.

Ten Chakras and three main channels of Pranic energy

By reading the writings of Yogis on this subject, these are my conclusions. I have no personal experience of these Chakras. There are description of ten Chakras and three ultra microscopic (sub atomic) hollow and collapsed circular channels.

1. **Muladhar Chakra**= This Chakra is close to the anal area. Once a Yogi can open this channel with Pranic energy, he becomes free from sexual desires.

2. **Swadhishtan Chakra**= about four fingerbreadth above the first Chakra Yogi encounters Swadhishtan Chakra. By placing Pranic energy in this Chakra, he develops feelings of universal love, nonviolence, and great surge of mental and physical energy.

3. **Manipurak Chakra**= this is located at the level of the umbilicus. When Yogi is able to move Prana into this Chakra, the physical and mental sufferings decrease considerably. It becomes easy to concentrate the mind and some awareness of soul as a separate entity from the body starts appearing.

4. **Surya Chakra**-Solar Plexus) This Chakra is located at the level of xiphisternum on either side of the vertebral column. This is the main site of Prana. This Chakra controls all the abdominal organs. Some Yogis refer to it

as the brain of the abdomen.

5. **Manash Chakra**= The Mana-part of Astral Body is located here.

6. **Hriday Chakra**= this is located close to the heart. The function of the heart is controlled from this Chakra. This is also the place where the Soul lives.

7. **Kanth Chakra or Vishuddhi Chakra**= this is located at the level of suprasternal notch. By concentrating on this Chakra, the Yogi becomes disinterested in worldly life and starts progressing in the path of Yoga. Rishi Dayanand has written that by concentrating in that center, Yogi can live without food and water for two months.

8. **Aagya Chakra**= This Chakra is located at the level of middle of the eyebrows. By infusing Pranic energy in this center, Yogi gains control over the autonomic functions of the body.

9. **Sahastrar Chakra**= It is located above the level of Uvula and is the center of all the possible mental and physical powers.

10. **Brahma Chakra**= this is located at the level of occiput bone on top and the back of the head.

In many other books, they combine two adjacent Chakras and the total number is described as either six or eight Chakras.

There is also description of three ultra microscopic, sub atomic, circular channels and their extensive branching in the body in Yogic literature.

1. **The Sushumna Narhi** (central channel) runs through the spinal cord area. It connects all the ten Chakras from the top of the head to the anal area.

2. **Idha Narhi** (channel on the left side of vertebral column). Some Yogis call it Yamuna Narhi (after the name of a river) or Moon Channel (Chandra Narhi).

3. Pingala Narhi= this channel is located at the right side of the vertebral column. This is also called Ganga Narhi (after the name of Ganges River) and Sun Channel (Surya Narhi).

These three channels join one another at the Aagya Chakra located at the level of the middle of the eyebrows. That junction is also referred as Triveni (junction of three rivers). Rishi Dayananda states that when a Yogi is able to move Pranic energy in all three channels and their junction at the level of Eighth Chakra, he transcends all sins. These two channels are in contact with eight Chakras and Sushumna Narhi (central channels) connects all ten of them.

They say that after the death, the soul wrapped in Astral Body leaves through the central channel and passes out from different apertures of the body. When a Yogi has become emancipated, he sheds his Astral Body and he forces open the top opening of the Sushumna Narhi and leaves from the occipital area from an opening called Brahma Randhra (opening of Brahma-God).

Many scholars think that the chains of sympathetic ganglia on both sides of the vertebral column are the two channels described above and spinal cord is the Sushumna Narhi. But Rishi Dayanand describes these channels to be very tiny and invisible to the eyes. These are the main channels but they have very extensive branching. According to Yogic literature, the soul, Astral Body and Pranic energy can travel along these channels and they exist entirely separate from the brain, spinal cord and nervous system and latter is under their control.

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Death

What is it? Why do we fear it? What happens after death?

When a close relative or a loved one dies, the sorrow and grief expressed by remaining family members is not because that they are sorry for the deceased person but in reality they are upset because the death has devoid them of the help, support and nurturing that they used to receive from that person. If a person loses her spouse, the person is sad because they fear the coming loneliness and loss of companionship. So the grief is not for the departed soul but they are grieving because the fulfillment of their personal desires and needs have been thwarted.

The reason that we weep and mourn is because we had attached our desires and expectations with that person. If there is no personal attachment, then their death cannot cause us sorrow. After all, thousands of people are born and die every day. But neither we rejoice at their birth nor grieve when they die. Why? Because we do not attach our personal desires with them. Thousands of people die in London, Paris or New York but we do not cry for them. But there are many people in those cities, which do mourn them because they had attachment with them.

Vedas say that we should use everything in this world with an understanding that it truly belongs to God and it has been given to us for a temporary use based on our Karmas. And God, as its true owner, reserves his rights to take it back at any time of His choosing. For example;

Q. Mr. X borrows a book from Mr. Y for reading. Mr. X loves the book and before he has had a chance to finish reading it, Mr. Y comes along and wants his book back. Mr. X would like to finish reading the book and does not want to return the book. Who is right?

A. Mr. X should not only return the book but also thank Mr. Y for letting him borrow it.

Q. f Mr. X does not return the book, what will happen?

A. Mr. Y is within his rights to forcibly take his book back and Mr. X would be upset about it.

Q. Why Did Mr. X had to suffer the anguish?

A. It was self-inflicted. He developed sense of ownership towards the book, which did not belong to him and he did not want to return the book. And when it was bound to be taken away from him, he was setting himself up for disappointment.

Q. How could he have avoided this anguish?

A. Mr. X should have this knowledge that the book has been given to him for use for a limited time. Then he would not develop attachment to it. Further more he should thankfully return the book whenever the real owner wants it back.

This emotion is attachment. Just like this book, every thing in this world, which includes wealth, land, children, relatives and friends and even our body, belong to God and because of our good or bad Karmas, have been given to us by God for a limited time. Whenever God sees fit, He can take it back. If we form deep attachments and start to feel a sense of ownership, then we do not want to part with it and since it is inevitable, we are bound to suffer.

True reality of relationships

Q. Between father and son, is the relationship between their souls?

A. No, because all the souls are eternal and of same age and in a father son relationship, there has to be age difference.

Q. Is there relation between the two bodies?

A. No, because after the death, the body still remains but nobody keeps it in the house considering it to be father or son. They either bury or cremate it.

It is only the union of the soul with the body that is a father or a son, therefore, after the death, when the soul departs from the body; the relationship comes to an end. And there is no need to grieve, since the relationship has ceased to exist.

And there is another hard practical reality, which must be faced.

A Persian poet has said that if there was the slightest hope of the deceased relative coming back, I am willing to cry and mourn for hundred years. One can also foster acceptance by realizing that the life belonged to God and He has taken it back.

Does death cause suffering?

The life and death can be likened to day and night. After we work hard during the day, we are exhausted and when we rest and sleep in the night, it rejuvenates us and restores our energy.

A person works during his lifetime and in the evening of his life in old age; he becomes tired and has lots of aches and pains. The night of death replaces the old body with new healthy young life once again. In that sense, the death is a welcome friend.

In Bhagvad Geeta, Lord Krishna tells Prince Arjuna that to the soul, the body is like the clothes we wear. After the clothes become old and tattered, we gladly discard them and wear new clothes. The soul does exactly the same thing.

Q. Your idea sounds very good but in real life we see that even a person suffering from leprosy or incurable diseases doesn't want to die and greatly fears death. Practically speaking the death is considered very painful and undesirable, so how can you say that it is a good thing?

A. It is true that in day today life, death is perceived as very painful and is to be avoided at all cost. The reason is that in this world, we get attached to our living and nonliving possessions and we don't want to part with them.

Q. Let us suppose that a wealthy person and member of a large family is close to death. After death, what will he take with him when he dies?

A. According to our scriptures, he will only take the results of his Karmas with him.

Q. What about the land, money, spouse or his children?

A. Of course he can't take them with him.

Q. Is it because he doesn't want to or because he can't?

A. Because he can't. He doesn't have a choice.

That is exactly true. He perceives death as that event that forcibly separates him from all those things that he has become very attached to. So he dreads the death. On the other hand, if he was like a teacher, who uses the chair, desk, blackboard, chalk etc. while teaching his students; and at the end of the period, leaves these things without a thought or regret because all along, he was very clear in his mind that these things do not belong to him but are meant for his temporary use. So he can walk away from these things very easily. In a similar manner, if the wealthy person had formed no attachments with his possessions, he would not fear death so much.

If you see yourself in a concave or convex mirror, your appearance looks distorted. Similarly when we see the death with the glasses of attachment (Moh or Mamta), it looks very scary to us.

Let me give another example;

Q. If in a group, a person breaks some rules or behaves badly, and is asked to leave, will he be upset or not?

A. Yes, he will resent it.

Q. On the other hand, if the person leaves of his own volition, will it still bother him or not?

A. No, why should that bother him?

In both cases, he is separated from the group, but when he leaves it of his free will, he suffers no pain. If he is forced to leave, he suffers mental anguish. Therefore, if a person leaves this world without forming attachments and sense of ownership, he dies with peace of mind. But when one gets attached to things and people in life, we don't want to leave them. And death appears to us as a tyrant, who forcibly separates us from the things that we love and that is why we fear death.

Q. What happens during Death?

A. Brihaddarnyopanishada describes what happens during death.

When a king comes to visit a place and when he is about to leave, all the higher officials come together to bid him good bye. Similarly when the king of the body, the soul, is ready to leave, it withdraws its Pranic energy which was distributed all over the body. When Prana leaves the eyes, the person loses his ability to see and all his relatives start to say that he does not see any more. In a similar way, he loses his capacity to hear, smell, touch, move, talk and think.

Then the Prana concentrates in the Astral body and with the help of Udan Prana, the soul wrapped in the Astral Body, leaves the body. It is sub atomic in size and leaves through the eyes, ears, and mouth and in some people through excretory passages. There are descriptions in ancient scriptures that the soul briefly sees God where his entire life is displayed before him as he sees the imprints recorded in his Astral Body. Based upon his Karmas, he proceeds to be born into his next life.

Kathopanishada says that those souls, which have become emancipated, discard their Astral Body and leave from an opening at the top of the occipital region also known as Brahma Randhra.

Q. How long does it take to go to next life after death?

A. Yajyavalkalya's answer to king Janaka in response to this question was that time needed was similar to an insect walking over a blade of grass when it reaches its end, steps on to the next leaf. The soul also leaves the body and starts new life in very tiny fraction of time.

Q. What happens after death?

A. Depending upon the Karmas, person achieves new life. If his Good and bad Karmas are equal, he is born as a human being. If the life has been very sinful, person is born into animal or plant forms as a punishment and after paying his dues; he is

again born as a human being. All lower forms of lives are for punishment only.

There are some people who have done many kind and generous Karmas in their life, they are born into very wealthy families, enjoy good physical and mental health and lead very charmed lives till their Karmic balance runs out (unless they have been making regular deposits in it). These people have done good deed with a desire for name and fame and indeed through Divine Justice they live happy and successful worldly lives.

There are few rare individuals, who perform great acts of service and compassion as their duty without any desire of monetary rewards or name and fame. These Karmas are called Nishkam Karmas and person who performs them is called Karma Yogi. These individuals are then emancipated and achieve freedom from the cycles of life and death and hence all sufferings for very long period of time. (36000 X day and night of Brahma-8.64 billions of years).Thus the Emancipation is finite. At the end the soul enters again into cycle of life and death.

There are many scholars who believe that after Emancipation, a soul escapes life and death cycles for eternity. Rishi Dayananda disagrees with this point of view. According to him, the Karmas of even the greatest Yogi are finite and limited and there can be no Emancipation granted for infinite and unlimited time. The numbers of souls is fixed. They are eternal. They were never born and they will never die. No new souls are being created. They go from life and death cycles to Emancipation and back.

Q. Can you choose the time and manner of your death? (Ichha Mrityu)

A. There are mentions of a yogi being able to remove his soul and astral body by free will and leave the body and choose his moment of death. There are three examples of Bhishma Pitamaha, Dronacharya, and Bhurishrava in the epic Mahabharata where they gave up their life by free will.

When a Yogi feels that his purpose and mission in life is

complete, through a technique similar to hyperventilation and carbon dioxide narcosis, he can die at will. In the autobiography of Rishi Dayananda, he states that when he was practicing Yoga, he knew of five Yogis who were ready to die by free will. He also writes about occasions when two Yogis invited him to witness their death so he could learn the technique.

Dayananda at the time of his death, indeed went into deep trance and uttering," O God, thy will be done", gave up his life. There were about 15 witnesses and no body had seen this kind of death ever in their life. According to Dayananda, Yogi has absolutely no mental or physical discomfort while dying. The death comes under his control. Yogi dies in a state of peace and great joy.

When a yogi separates from his body whether in advanced state of Yoga or at the time of death, all physical sufferings disappear and his knowledge and freedom of action increases many fold. When Yogi is able to discard his Astral Body whether in the highest state of Yoga or at the time of death and Emancipation, he directly experiences the infinite knowledge and love of God.

Q. **What rituals should be performed after death?**

A. In Yajur Veda and Ishopanishada, the recommendation is that body should be cremated. There is common tradition that sun should not set on the dead body. If the person dies during day time, the cremation is performed the same day. If death occurred at night, cremation ceremony is done first thing the next day.

The body is bathed, dressed in clean clothes and taken to a particular place where cremation can be done. A pile of clean and dry wood is made and body is placed on top of it. Then a priest recites Vedic verses praying to God and the eldest son or close relative sets the wood on fire. All the people who have accompanied the body also carry a log of wood, which they add to the fire and join in the prayer. The God is enjoined to

give good life to the soul and peace and comfort to the members of the family.

There is also tradition in some parts of the country where women do not go to the crematoriums. The pregnant women are forbidden to go lest they harm the baby with too much grief. Three days later, Vedic tradition is to collect and bury the bones of the dead body in the ground. The distant relatives, who were unable to reach at the time of cremation, come from eighth to twelfth day to express their sorrow and provide support to the family. Rishi Dayananda recommends that the family and friends should pray and should donate money, land etc. to worthy causes in the memory of the dead person. The greatest donation is providing education and highest gift of education is considered to teach Vedas, related scriptures and Yoga.

From about 3000 years ago, some dishonest Brahmins introduced very elaborate customs that the family was supposed to follow after the death of an individual. This custom was called Shradh, an act of homage to the dearly departed. Unfortunately, the Brahmins abused the emotional state of the family to gain money, land, cattle and food etc. for themselves. Needless to say that there is no sanction for it in Vedic scriptures.

There is further a tradition for the last 1500 years where the family takes the bones of the deceased after cremation to certain sacred places where members of priestly class perform ceremonies, collect large amount of money as donation and disperse the bones in the rivers. The most popular places in North India are the cities of Haridwar and Benares located at the bank of river Ganges, which is considered sacred. Again this has deteriorated in to shameless business and exploitation of blind faith of the grief stricken families. There is no sanction for these activities in Vedic literature.

As an interesting byproduct of this tradition of going to the

sacred city to disperse the bones, there is great opportunity to study genealogy. Let me explain. When an individual goes to the city of Haridwar in North India with the bony remains of their relative, the priests ask them about the city from which they have arrived. The entire North India has been divided into different segments and different priest families' service different areas with mutual consent.

Let us say that you have arrived from a certain city, you will be directed to that particular priest. He will take you to his office and he will pull out a huge book. He will ask your name, your father's name and the name of your town or village. Then he will find your family's account and absolutely astonish you with the history of your family going back to several generations. He may be able to tell you that you are in U.S.A. now and will tell you, your spouse's and your children's names. How does he know that? Some of my distant relatives may have gone to the city for another death in their family and the priest had updated his records. The oldest records are about 1500 years old and are written on copper or gold plates for the famous kings or wealthy merchants of that period. Again there is no sanction for this tradition in Vedic literature. Also the tradition of dispersing the bones in the river pollutes the water.

If the person is too poor, members of the community contribute money etc. to help in cremation. Due to lack of firewood in third world countries, electric crematoriums are also being used in urban areas.

I will finish this chapter with some memorable verses from Indian Scriptures. They are often quoted in post death ceremonies.

1. **Manu Samriti-** When I died, the house, wealth and my properties, for which I toiled day and night and gave away best years of my life, didn't even look at me. My wife bid me good-bye from the edge of the home. My dear children, friends and relatives accompanied me to the crematorium. And this body

that I spent all my life in providing pleasures and comforts left me at the pile of fire. Only the good and bad Karmas that I performed in my life travel with me to the end.

2. **Yaksha asks king Yudhishtra,**" What is the most amazing thing that you have seen in this world?"

King Yudhishtra answered," We hear and see that people die every day and sometime we attend some of these funerals. Yet we have this firm conviction that it is not going to happen to us!"

3. Verses from Bhagvad Geeta are often recited at the time of the death. Let me write few of them.

A. There was never a time when we did not exist and there never will be a time when we will cease to exist (In other words soul is eternal).

B. Just as the soul acquiring the body goes through childhood, youth and old age, it also receives a new body after death. Therefore, there is no need to mourn after death.

C. Even though the soul is eternal, in its ignorance, it identifies with the dualities of life, of heat and cold, happiness and sufferings etc.

D. When a person through true knowledge and practice of Yoga understands the difference between his soul and body, he acquires emotional equanimity and maintains great mental calm in the ups and downs of life.

E. The soul is indestructible. It is only the body that is constantly changing and has limited life span.

F. If a person thinks that the soul dies, he is ignorant.

G. The soul was never born, will never die. It is timeless. When the body dies, it is unaffected by it.

H. Just as a person discards old and tattered clothes and puts on clean and new ones, the soul leaves the old, sick and

nonfunctioning body and acquires new body in reincarnation.

I. The weapons cannot destroy the soul. Fire cannot burn it. Water cannot wet it and the wind cannot dry it. It is indestructible.

J. The soul is invisible conscious entity. You cannot know it with your senses or understand it with your mind or intellect.

K. For the sake of an argument, if you consider that the soul is born and then it dies, even then there is no need to grieve because it is normal and natural thing.

L. Any body that is born must die one day. We all know that. Let me also tell you that any body that dies is definitely born again. This is the immutable truth. Let us accept it and there is no reason to grieve.

M. What I have stated about soul is true but most people fail to grasp its real meaning. They thing it is miraculous or supernatural thing. Many refuse to believe it.

N. Only by acquiring true knowledge and confirming it with the practice of Yoga, can you really understand this greatest of all the knowledge.

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Personal Thoughts

Many people are interested in learning about ancient religious beliefs of India and Yoga. I have read several books written by western and eastern scholars. But I was disappointed by their writings. If you go to India and study the religion, you will find it very confusing. Your views will depend upon where you study and what is the bias of your teacher. That is why I wrote the tenets of this belief system based on the scriptures from Vedas to Bhagvad Geeta. There was only one common religion in India from the period of Vedas to the writing of Geeta. From the time When Geeta was written (about 5200 years ago), there has been gradual decline in the religious practices. That is why, I urge my readers to read the chapter on the history of religion and it will give them a sound basis to evaluate the religious practices a modern visitor may encounter in India.

Many people read about God, Souls, and Astral Body and Yogic experiences and start shaking their head. All I can say is there is consistent affirmation of Yogic experiences by many Yogis, Writers of Upanishadas, Sages Patanjali and Vyasa who have related their experiences. In recent times, great Yogis Dayananda and Narayan Swami have written and corroborated these observations.

At its heart, it must remain a subjective experience. The description of immense peace, joy, healing soothing light, a feeling of great mental and physical well being have all been described. Words and our language is totally inadequate to express or explain this experience. Common example given is;

Supposing you met a person who had never tasted sugar; how will you explain to this person about the taste of sugar? You might say that it is very sweet, makes you feel very happy etc. But you will agree that the word sweet still does not convey the exact taste of sugar. Finally you give that person a cube of sugar and let him taste it. Now he really understands the sugar taste. You could say that he has had Ahaa experience. Now imagine his difficulty in trying to impart his experience when he meets another person who has never tasted sugar.

Now if you have been meditating and meet a Yogi, he can guide you and affirm your experience but there is no objective way of measuring it. There are verses in Yoga Shastra and Bhagvad Geeta which describe the qualities and personality characteristics of Yogis in different stages of advancement. For example, an advanced Yogi will have universal love and compassion, truthfulness, fearlessness and magnetic personality e.g. Swami Dayananda in 19th Century.

Let us use a worldly example. Supposing I went to professor Einstein and asserted that his theories of relativity defied common sense and I find it hard to believe that passage of time would slow down if a person could travel at the speed of light etc. Professor Einstein would be correct to tell me to finish high school, major in physics in college and proceed to get a doctorate in physics and then may be I will be able to understand as to what he was talking about. And further more, I have to have an analytical mind and great aptitude for Physics if I can have any hope of understanding the complex and elegant work of Professor Einstein.

Yogi also makes a similar argument. Do you just want to criticize or do you really want to know whether claims of Yogis are true? Yogi says that you have to learn to first focus your mind on one subject and then silence the mind and then you will know for yourself. Then he tells you that the wisdom of ages is that unless you lead a moral and ethical life, your mind will remain restless and you cannot progress. Most of the humanity is motivated by Sexual desire (Putreshana), Acquisition of money (Vitteshana) and Desire to be famous (Lokeshana) and are simply not interested in Yoga or meditation. If this topic is of interest you, you are a small minority.

If you try to follow the five Yamas (non violence, truth, non stealing, control of senses and non hoarding) and five Niyamas (inner and outer cleanliness, contentment, perseverance in your effort, self reflection and studying scriptures, making oneself an instrument of God's will), you will advance in Yoga. Most of the work consists of examining and monitoring all our life activities. If an aspirant can reduce their personal needs, to that extent he becomes mentally free and it is easier to focus the mind. Donation of time, money and

service to worthy causes without regard to financial benefits or fame also purifies and quiets the restless mind. It is helpful to associate with like-minded aspirants and you can strengthen each other's resolve.

Let me say few words about myself. I have simply written down the theoretical knowledge I have acquired over the years and had the good fortune to observe my uncle who was a sincere and advanced Yogi. I am very average person and I am always struggling within myself to follow the path but have had very limited success. I have no significant personal experience but yet I do believe. May be it is my brain washing I received during my childhood.

I sincerely believe that many of my readers are far more advanced than me. We are fellow travelers on a quest for the Infinite joy, peace of mind and bliss. If this effort has been of some help, I am delighted. Every aspirant has some areas of strength and other areas of difficulty or weaknesses. You do the best you can, never get discouraged and if you have limited success in this life, God will grant you the right aptitude and circumstances to carry on this effort in next lives. This is what I believe.

Dr. Satya Pal Arya was born in Rawalpindi,Pakistan. After the partition, his family moved to Himachal Pradesh, India. He finished his Medical School education at All India Institute of Medical Sciences at New Delhi, India.

He Migrated to United States in 1970. He finished his post graduate training in the specialty of Ears Nose and Throat and Head and Neck Surgery at Case Reserve University at Cleveland, Ohio. He is currently in Private Practice of E.N.T. Surgery in California.

During His childhood, he was exposed to Vedic Philosophy due mostly to the influence of his uncle Prof. Ram Prashad Vedalankar who was teaching Vedas at Gurukul Kangri at Haridwar India. Prof. Ram Prashad Vedalankar was a true Karma Yogi and had a level of chracter and integrity rarely seen. He was also deeply influnced by the writings of Swami Daya Nanda, founder of Arya Samaj. He has extensively studied most of tha Vedic scriptures.This book represents a brief synthesis of his life time of studying the Scriptures.

The Vedic Philosophy

Most of us spend our lives searching for happiness, comforts and pleasures and trying to prevent or avoid suffering. When we are successful, we do indeed find satisfaction. But we have to acknowledge that these pleasures are transitory and short lived. All of us have searched for peace, joy and fulfillment in material things, family and friends and looking for name and fame. A cynic tells us that sex, money and fame make the world go round. But peace and contentment elude us.

There is a deep yearning in our hearts to achieve a state of mind where we are at peace with ourselves and are not constantly buffeted by contradictory emotional storms and desires that rage in our minds. Is it a pipe dream? Can such a state of mind be achieved?

The scriptures in every religion have tried to answer these fundamental questions in different ways for thousands of years. In this book, I am writing the belief system illustrated in vedic traditation

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